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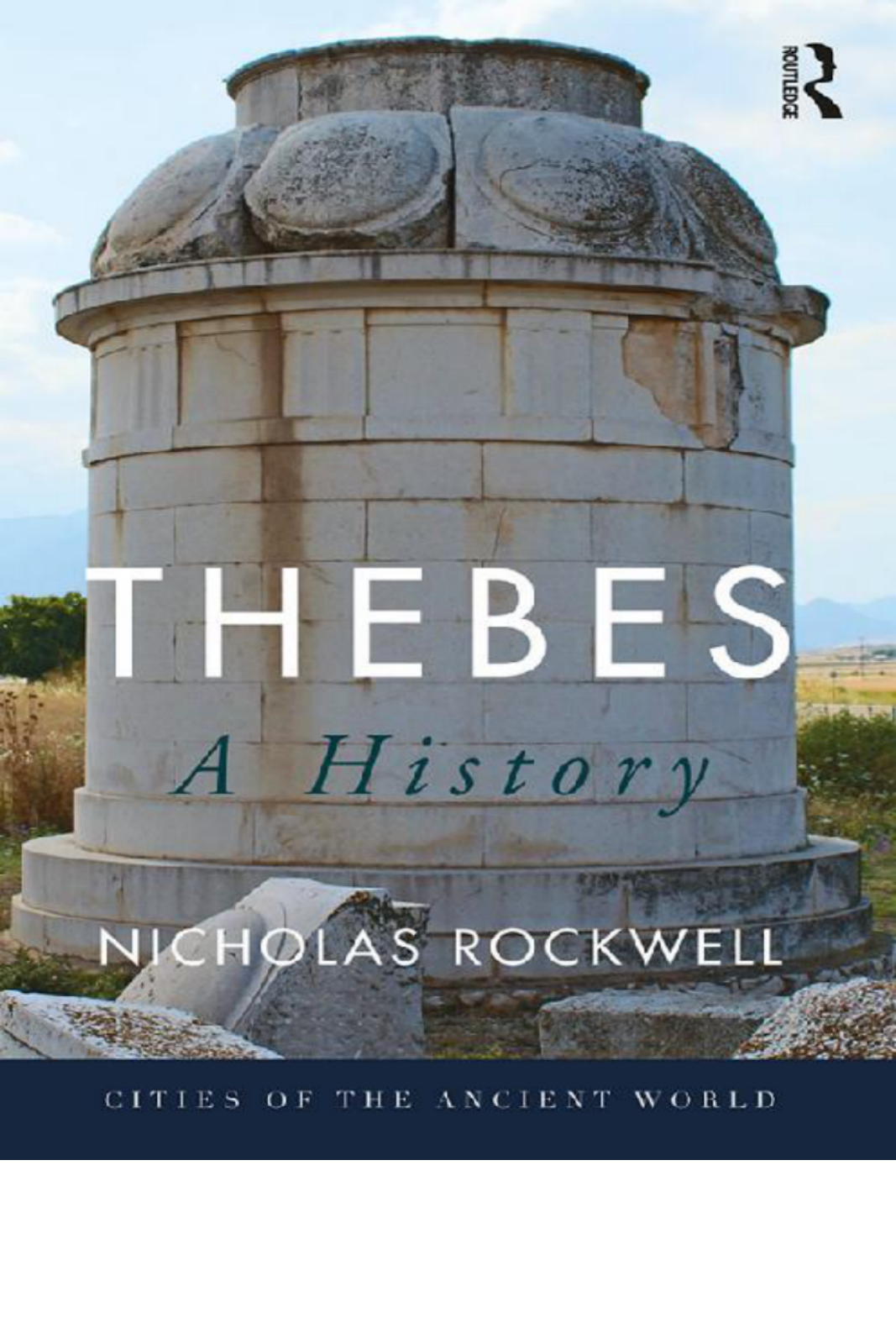
A History

NICHOLAS ROCKWELL

CITIES OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

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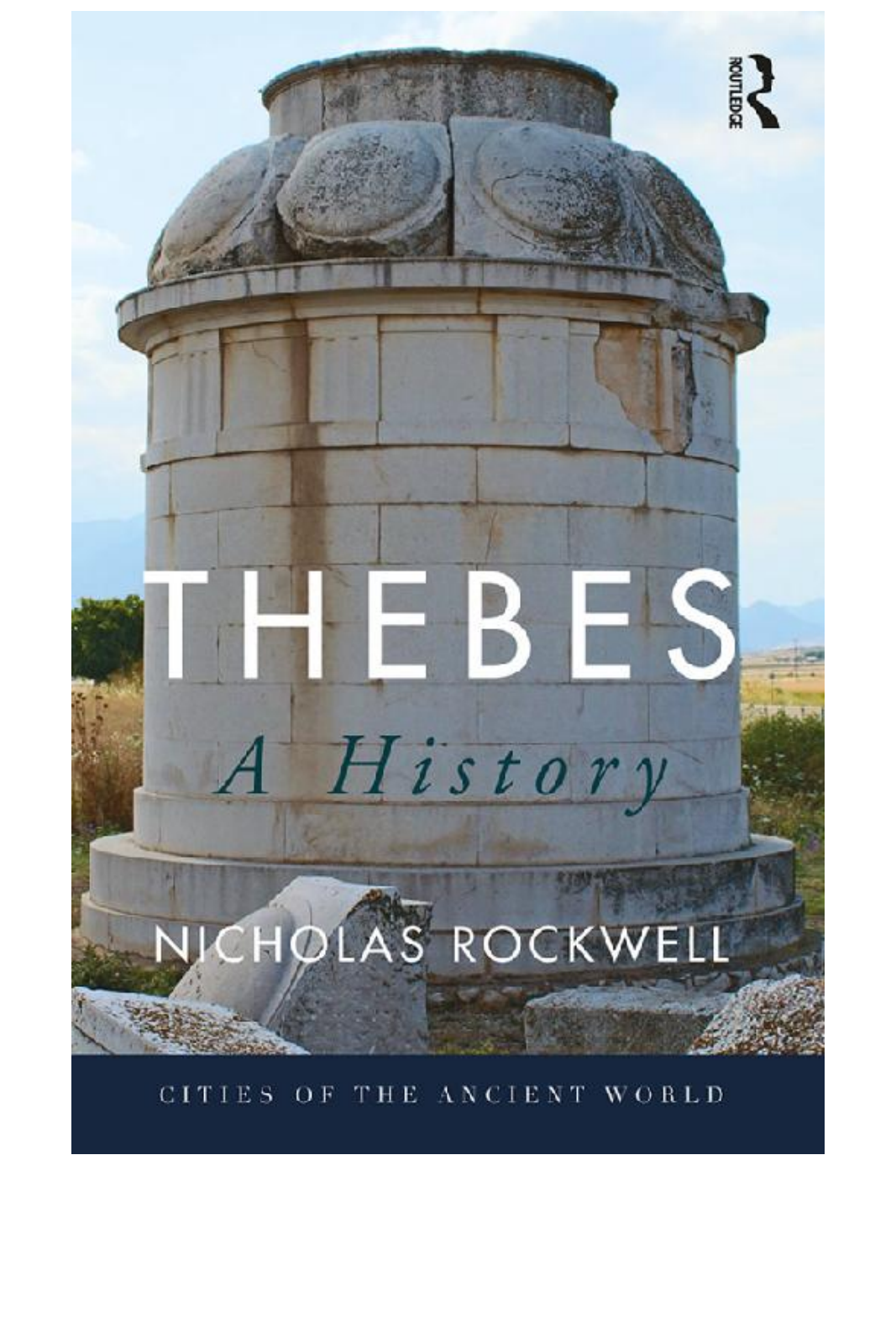
The background of the cover is a photograph of an ancient stone structure, likely a tomb or a small temple, made of large, rectangular stone blocks. The structure has a cylindrical body and a domed top with decorative elements. It is situated in a field with some vegetation and mountains in the distance under a clear sky.

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The background of the cover is a photograph of an ancient stone structure, likely a well or a small temple, made of large, rectangular stone blocks. The structure is cylindrical and has a domed top with decorative elements. It is situated in a rural landscape with hills in the background and some vegetation in the foreground. The sky is blue with some clouds.

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Thebes

Thebes offers a scholarly survey of the history and archaeology of the city. Discussions of major developments in politics, war, society, and culture form the basis of a chronological examination of one of Greece's most powerful and dynamic cities. By taking a broad view, the book's account speaks to larger trends in the ancient Mediterranean world while also demonstrating how Thebes was unique in its ancient context. It provides an up-to-date examination of all available information: topographic, demographic, numismatic, epigraphic, archaeological, and textual evidence provides the most complete, current picture of ancient Thebes and illustrates the value of an interdisciplinary approach.

Nicholas Rockwell received his BA and MA from CSU, Fresno and his PhD from UCLA. His research focuses on the connections between military and political developments in the ancient world; he is currently working on a monograph about the citizen-soldier in antiquity. He has taught at UCLA and the University of Denver with courses on ancient Greece, Rome, the Near East, Egypt, comparative history, and warfare and politics.

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Thebes

A History

Nicholas Rockwell

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To my parents

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Acknowledgments

This book is meant as an introductory survey of the history of the ancient Greek city of Thebes. I have relied primarily on the ancient textual evidence, including inscriptions, but have taken into consideration the material culture as much as possible: there are brief descriptions of the most important authors in the section entitled Ancient Sources. In the notes and bibliography, I have also pointed to some of the most significant discussions in the modern scholarship related to Thebes as a starting point for those interested in pursuing further lines of inquiry. Maps and a Family Tree for Theban myth have also been provided to give additional help in visualizing the geographical and mythological context of ancient Thebes.

I would like to thank Victor Davis Hanson for suggesting I look at Thebes when I first began my foray into ancient Greek history. He has always been very generous with his time in providing incisive feedback and suggestions along the way. I would especially like to thank my former dissertation advisor David Phillips who read the entire manuscript and offered valuable comments throughout: he continues to be a paragon of academic advising and friendship. The readers for Routledge also provided much helpful advice. Any remaining errors, however, remain my sole responsibility. I would also like to thank my former colleagues in the History Department at the University of Denver, especially Ingrid Tague and Susan Schulten. I feel very fortunate to have been part of such a wonderful collection of scholars and people. I would also like to acknowledge the staffs at Penrose Library and the Denver Public Library, who fulfilled all my requests and were always efficient and friendly. I owe a special thanks to Amy Davis-Poynter, Laura Pilsworth, and Elizabeth Thomasson at Routledge for their help and professionalism throughout the writing of the book.

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throughout. Her love and support have been invaluable in so many ways, and I look forward to sharing many more adventures.

All dates are BCE and all translations are my own unless stated otherwise. Abbreviations for ancient sources and modern journals generally follow the fourth edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. For the text of the Oxyrhynchus historian, also known as the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, I follow the Teubner of Mortimer Chambers; the textual divisions for Plutarch are those of the Loeb Classical Library. I use the Latinized English spelling of ancient Greek personal and place names because it will be the most familiar for most readers. My periodization for ancient Theban history is only approximate for the early periods and I have divided Classical Thebes into three separate chapters because of the amount of evidence for the Classical Age. I use traditional period names throughout for convenience.

Introduction

Thebes was a powerful and dynamic city that played a crucial role in important historical developments in ancient Greece. It was the site of a major palace center in the Mycenaean Age (1600–1200) with connections throughout the eastern Mediterranean region. After Mycenaean palaces were destroyed during a period of great upheaval, all of Greece entered a period of considerable decline in an ensuing Dark Age (1200–800) – populations shrank, writing was lost, and cultural production was significantly reduced before rebounding in the Greek Renaissance (800–700). During the Archaic Age (700–479), Thebes worked to unify the region of Boeotia but lost its authority when it sided with the Persians at the battle of Plataea in 479. Thebes eventually regained its leading position in Boeotia and briefly attained hegemony in Greece during the Classical Age (479–323). Alexander the Great sacked Thebes in 335, but the city was rebuilt some twenty years later. And even though the city never regained the power and prestige of the Classical Age, its history during the Hellenistic Age (323–30) and Roman Empire (30 BCE–476 CE) presents an important epilogue to its storied past.

For all periods of Theban history archaeology provides only limited evidence, but beginning in the Mycenaean Age there are indications of a viable Bronze Age city. The main inhabited area was the Theban acropolis known as the Cadmea – named after Cadmus the legendary Phoenician prince who traveled to Greece in search of his sister Europa. Cadmus was unable to find Europa, but according to tradition he managed to lay the foundations for the city of Thebes.¹ There were two other legendary founders of Thebes, the twins Amphion and Zethus, who were said to have built the famous walls of the city.² Although the myths about early Thebes should not be considered accurate historical accounts, they do provide insight into how later Greeks viewed the important role of Thebes in the Mycenaean Age.

With the collapse of Mycenaean society around 1200, Thebes went through a period of drastic population decline and the disappearance of the writing system known as Linear B – a syllabic script used for palace administration

records. This period in ancient Greek history is traditionally known as the Dark Age (ca. 1200–800) because palace centers were abandoned and the ability to write was lost.³ Also, the amount and quality of material culture paled in comparison to earlier and later periods in Greek history. However, the Dark Age provided the ideal environment for the development of a dynamic and diverse oral poetry that culminated in the Homeric epics, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The poetry of Homer was first written down in a script adapted from the Phoenician alphabet during the Greek Renaissance (ca. 800–700). It was also at this time that populations and trade increased dramatically and Greek colonies began to be established throughout the Mediterranean.

Part of the explanation for this Greek resurgence involves the unique geography of Greece with its mountainous terrain, limited arable land, and easy access to sea routes to far-off regions. During the Archaic Age (700–479), cities like Thebes reestablished connections with the Near East and Egypt and experimented with different forms of political and social organization. Thebans living in the Archaic Age did not revive royal or palatial institutions; instead, over time they instituted more egalitarian practices in politics and society. One of the key foundations for these changes was military innovation. With the appearance of heavily armed infantrymen known as hoplites, Thebes and other Greek city-states underwent radical changes. What distinguished hoplites from soldiers in earlier periods was the fact that they supplied their own military equipment and were initially outside the direct control of centralized authority. During the Mycenaean Age palaces equipped and maintained veritable standing armies, but in the Archaic Age almost all armies, with the exception of Sparta, were composed of independent citizen-soldiers.⁴

A major turning point for Greek culture came at the end of the Archaic Age when the Greeks fought the Persian Wars. In a series of land and sea battles, the Greeks defeated the forces of the Persian Empire and forged a distinctive identity that blossomed during the Classical Age (479–323). In this period Thebes played a central role in wider Greek military and political affairs. For most of the fifth century, Thebes was an ally of Sparta, but in the early part of the fourth century it became an ally of Athens. Then, after the Thebans and their fellow Boeotians defeated the Spartans at the battle of Leuctra in 371, they became the leading power in Greece. This transformation from a powerful ally to the leading city in Greece was a result of military and political innovations. Similar to most other Greek states, Thebes relied on amateur hoplites to wage war; yet, it also fielded one of the best cavalries in Greece. The effective combination of heavily armed infantrymen and mobile cavalry units characterized Theban warfare throughout the Classical Age and ensured that oligarchy was the predominant form of government. Because hoplites traditionally supplied their own arms and cavalrymen maintained their own

mounts, Thebes's main military personnel came from the wealthier classes. This meant that the more exclusive ideology of oligarchy, which generally favored property qualifications and excluded the lower classes from political participation, shaped and guided Theban political practices and institutions for most of the Classical Age. Eight years before Leuctra, however, the Thebans had expelled a Spartan garrison encamped on the Cadmea and instituted democracy, which allowed them to draw from a much larger manpower base. The Spartans had been maintaining a garrison on Thebes's sacred Cadmea in order to keep the Thebans from disrupting the Spartan Hegemony (404–371). But this action galvanized the Theban population and ultimately led to the stunning Theban victory at Leuctra.

This fundamentally shifted power relations in Greece and allowed the Thebans to dominate the military and political landscape for the next several decades. Eventually, however, Macedonia became the most powerful state in Greek affairs. Philip II, who had been a hostage as a teenager in Thebes, transformed the Macedonian army into one of the most devastating militaries in the ancient world; and his son Alexander the Great went on to use this army to dominate Greece and eventually topple the Persian Empire. Philip implemented military innovations he probably saw firsthand in Thebes, such as the effective coordination of cavalry and infantry units, the development of a talented officer corps, and the use of various forms of light-armed soldiers. Moreover, as king of Macedonia with very few checks on his authority, Philip was able to build up an unstoppable military machine that eventually ended Greek independence at the battle of Chaeronea in 338. Thebes and Athens provided the bulk of the soldiers on the Greek side at this momentous battle, but Philip's professional and battle-hardened Macedonian army proved far superior. With only a fraction of his available manpower, Philip drove the Athenians from the field of battle and his son Alexander destroyed the famous Theban Sacred Band. Alexander succeeded his father two years later following Philip's assassination. And one year later in 335, after a rumor spread among the Greek states that Alexander had been killed in a northern campaign, the Thebans revolted against Macedonian rule. They attacked the Macedonian garrison and later refused to surrender when Alexander rapidly marched south and demanded capitulation. Without allies, outnumbered, and outmatched, the Thebans were utterly defeated. Alexander slaughtered the male population, enslaved the women and children, and destroyed most of the city. The power and brilliance of Classical Thebes was over in a flash, the city would never be the same.

Alexander wanted to send a message to the Greek states that rebellion would be punished with extreme prejudice. Alexander needed to make sure Greece remained quiet while he undertook his campaign against the Persian

Empire. In a few short years Alexander achieved his goal of conquering the Persian Empire but apparently did not have any clear plans for his new empire beyond endless military campaigns. On his deathbed in 323, at the age of thirty-two, Alexander purportedly left his empire “to the strongest.”⁵ His generals almost immediately began carving up his empire in a bloody struggle over his succession. In the ensuing conflict Greece became a major battleground. Thebes began to be rebuilt in 316/15, but autonomy and consensual forms of government were no longer a reality in the Hellenistic Age (323–30). Macedonian and Roman leaders made grand proclamations of restoring Greek freedom and allowed cities and federations to have the semblance of consensual government, but these declarations and allowances were only part of a larger power struggle to use Greece as a way to increase their political, military, and cultural standing.

Hellenistic Thebes became a shadow of its former self. In earlier periods Thebes had dominated the surrounding region of Boeotia, compelling the various communities to participate in a federal system that included joint political, military, economic, and cultural activities.⁶ Thebes served as the capital and guiding force of the Boeotian federation and used the manpower and resources of Boeotia to achieve its fourth-century hegemony. During the Hellenistic Age, however, the Boeotian federation was no longer the dominant power in central Greece. Other Greek federations became more powerful, particularly the neighboring Aetolian League as well as the Achaean League in the Peloponnesus. These federations for a time were able to compete successfully against foreign powers, but eventually Rome came to dominate all of Greece. In various bids to regain their former standing in Greece, the Thebans at times allied with Macedonian monarchs and at other times with Rome. However, after Rome defeated Macedonia in 168 at the battle of Pydna and then destroyed the city of Corinth after its defeat of the Achaean League in 146, the long process of making Greece a Roman province began to take hold. Still, there were alliances with foreign kings such as Mithridates VI of Pontus in the 80s that indicated a desire to throw off the indirect rule of Rome. However, this brought a swift Roman reaction by the Roman general Lucius Cornelius Sulla who compelled the Thebans to return to their alliance with Rome and punished them by taking away half of their territory. This ended any attempt by Thebes to play any significant role in Greek affairs for several centuries.

Soon after the Roman civil wars were brought to an end with the triumph of Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus at the battle of Actium in 31, Greece was incorporated into the Roman Empire as an official province called Achaea. Though it had no real political power, Thebes continued to have cultural significance throughout the period of the Roman Empire (30 BCE–476 CE).

Thebes was known for having wonderful gardens and annual competitions in honor of Heracles. The emperor Hadrian even honored the city with a visit in 125 CE. Plutarch, one of the most famous Greek authors in this period, came from the Boeotian city of Chaeronea, indicating that the region was not entirely devoid of cultural significance. Plutarch was a prolific writer, who advocated a political and cultural partnership between Greece and Rome. Although Greece no longer exercised political or military power, its rich heritage provided a cultural foundation for the Romans. This notion was not new but Plutarch gave it one of its most famous expressions in his paired biographies of famous Greeks and Romans that demonstrated the compatibility between the two cultural traditions. Pausanias was another Greek writer living in the second century CE who helped to keep the storied past of Greece alive. In his *Description of Greece*, he focused on significant monuments and places from earlier periods in Greek history, devoting an entire book to Boeotia. Pausanias based his travel account on his own first-hand experience, and so his work gives insight into contemporary conditions. Still the focus was always on Greece's famous past. Thebes regained some standing in Boeotia during the third century CE, and at the end of the following century it successfully withstood a Gothic attack, which provides a fitting end to the history of ancient Thebes.

Notes

- 1 Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.1.1, 3.4.1–2, 3.5.4; Edwards 1979; Berman 2004; Kühr 2006, esp. 83–133; Schachter 2016, 25–35. For Cadmus and his descendants, see Family Tree.
- 2 *Od.* 11.260–265; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.5–6; Demand 1982, 55–57; Gantz 1993, 483–488; Berman 2004; Kühr 2006, 118–132.
- 3 Modern scholars also use the term “Early Iron Age” for this period. For a recent discussion, see Kotsonas 2016.
- 4 For a recent discussion of the various debates surrounding Greek hoplites, see Kagan and Viggiano 2013.
- 5 Diod. 17.117.4; Arr. *Anab.* 7.26.3. Cf. Diod. 18.1.4; Curt. 10.5.5; Just. 12.15.8.
- 6 For recent discussions on Boeotia covering a range of topics, see Kühr 2006; Kowalzig 2007, 328–391; Larson 2007; Farinetti 2011; Mackil 2013, esp. 22–46, 64–85, 410–453; Fossey 2014; Ganter 2014; Beck and Ganter 2015; Schachter 2016; Gartland, 2017.

1 Mycenaean Thebes (1600–1200 BCE)

Thebes was one of the most powerful Greek cities during the Mycenaean Age (1600–1200) – a period also known as the Late Bronze Age. Archaeological evidence reveals a complex urban settlement with a developed bureaucracy and clear social hierarchy. Similar to other Mycenaean sites – such as Mycenae and Pylos – a king ruled in Thebes and oversaw a large administration that used a syllabic script known as Linear B, which recorded an early form of the Greek language. Throughout Greece kings were the largest landholders, appointed various officials, and held sumptuous banquets to maintain the goodwill of their subjects. Although recent scholarship has questioned the traditional picture of Mycenaean palatial society, it continues to provide the best explanation for the archaeological and textual evidence. Palaces were not the only locations of power, and alternative economies existed alongside state-controlled production. But Mycenaean palaces were the most important centers of political and military power and directed large-scale redistributive economies.¹

Material remains and later reflections in Greek literature demonstrate that war was a central feature of Mycenaean society. Scholars have rightly pointed out that it is problematic to read material culture as an exact mirror of a historical reality without duly considering that imagery is often a self-conscious attempt to project power. Also, just because the Mycenaean spoke an early form of Greek does not mean that we can automatically translate a similar word by its later meaning. For example, the later Greek word for king (*basileus*), during the Mycenaean Age, was closer in meaning to the designation for mayor. The meaning of many words certainly changed over time; but there was certainly continuity as well, which allows scholars to make certain generalizations about the Mycenaean world.

Much of the archaeological remains from Mycenaean Greece shows clear evidence of a warrior culture. The most famous objects come from warrior graves in Mycenae, but rich grave goods and palatial objects have also been found in Thebes. A finely wrought silver bowl from a seventeenth-century

warrior grave sharply contrasts with a bronze spearhead. And a lapis lazuli ornament in the shape of figure-of-eight shields beautifully complements a cache of bronze spearheads found in one of the main palatial buildings.² The cumulative evidence from Mycenaean Thebes clearly points to a warlike society dominated by wealthy kings and warriors.



Figure 1.1 Silver bowl from a warrior grave in Mycenaean Thebes (1700–1600 BCE)

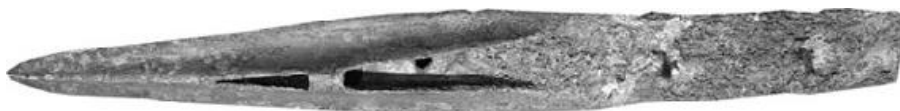


Figure 1.2 Bronze spearhead from a warrior grave in Mycenaean Thebes (1700–1600 BCE)

One of the central features of warfare in the Mycenaean Age was the prominence of chariot forces. Horse-drawn chariots first appear in the Near East around 1600 and subsequently spread to Egypt and the Aegean. The effective combination of lightweight carts with the speed of horses created an arms race among major states. The composite bow also appeared at the same time – it had much greater firepower than previous iterations of the weapon. Only robust state apparatuses could maintain highly specialized chariot units. Textual evidence from the Near East, Egypt, and Mycenaean Greece reveal that palaces provided wheels, carts, horses, and supplies for charioteers. Linear B tablets indicate that at Pylos in the Peloponnese the palace had over one

hundred chariots, and at Cnossus in Crete there were some three hundred chariots. These come from storage or production contexts, but another set of documents from Cnossus may point to a standing force of two hundred and fifty chariots.³ Scholars have questioned the effectiveness of chariots in the mountainous terrain of Greece, but the region had ample open spaces to effectively deploy mobile chariot forces. In later periods these areas became the central battlegrounds for heavily armed hoplites, who fought in mass formations known as phalanxes that also required broad, open plains. The Persian general Mardonius said as much during the Persian Wars. Herodotus has him say of the Greeks, “Whenever they publicly declare war on one another, they search out the best and most level place and go there and fight.”⁴ The topography of Greece in many ways was ideal for war, with certain open spaces serving as recurring battle sites. Thebes, in fact, was located in the heart of one of the most prominent theaters of war. The famous Theban general Epaminondas reportedly called the region of Boeotia with its various open spaces and central role in military conflicts throughout the centuries the “dancing floor of war.”⁵ Some of the most momentous battles of the Classical Age were decided there: Plataea (479), Coronea (446 and 394), Delium (424), Haliartus (395), Leuctra (371), and Chaeronea (338).⁶



Figure 1.3 Lapis lazuli ornament in the shape of figure-of-eight shields (1300–1200 BCE)



Figure 1.4 Collection of bronze spearheads and grapnel from Thebes, Orchomenus, and Tanagra (1400–1200 BCE)

Linear B tablets from Mycenaean Thebes unfortunately do not provide information about specific battles or campaigns, but they do reveal that similar to other Mycenaean centers of power, the palace at Thebes supported a large number of people. Most important, the palace seems to have supported a core of professional soldiers – a veritable warrior elite. This monopoly on military force ensured that the palace could quickly respond to attacks, as well as aggressively expand its sphere of influence. Because Linear B tablets were primarily accounting records, there are no grand proclamations such as Sargon of Akkad’s famous statement that “fifty-four hundred men eat in the presence of Sargon on a daily basis.”⁷ This statement – written about a millennium before the zenith of Mycenaean power – is often taken to be the first clear reference to a standing army in the ancient world. Mycenaean armies may not have been as large as Sargon’s army, since the total population of Mycenaean Thebes probably was no larger than Sargon’s purported standing army.⁸ Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that Mycenaean palaces could muster forces of a couple thousand. In addition to standing armies, there is evidence that feasting also played a major role in Mycenaean society. By the Late

Bronze Age, the Mycenaeans were part of what scholars call the Club of Great Powers, which included powerful kingdoms in the Near East and Egypt. Near Eastern sources in particular seem to have referred to the Mycenaeans as Ahhiyawa – a name reminiscent of the later Homeric designation Achaeans – who were considered a significant military threat to the other powerful kingdoms.⁹ Near Eastern cylinder seals unearthed from Mycenaean Thebes demonstrate that the Mycenaeans were in fact part of this international system. However, unlike other members of the Club of Great Powers in the Near East and Egypt, Mycenaean Greece does not seem to have been a unified kingdom.¹⁰ The various palace centers appear to have been largely autonomous and probably only controlled their surrounding territories.

Minoans

The most important predecessors to the Mycenaean Greeks were the Minoans, whose civilization originated on the island of Crete. Later Greek stories attributed an early Aegean naval empire to Minos, the king of Crete;¹¹ but this seems to reflect cultural influence rather than direct military control. The Minoans, a modern designation derived from the legendary Minos, provided the basic blueprint for the Mycenaeans: they built large palace complexes, developed the still undeciphered writing system known as Linear A that became the basis for Mycenaean Linear B, and established wide-ranging contacts throughout the eastern Mediterranean. For about four hundred years (1900–1500) the Minoans were the preeminent culture in the Aegean, but eventually Mycenaean Greeks conquered the island of Crete. This is confirmed by the appearance on Crete of mainland Greek material culture and the Linear B script. Although Linear A has not been deciphered, there are indications that it was used to record a non-Greek language. There has been intense interest in uncovering the origins of the Minoans, but the available information is too scanty to make any clear-cut declarations. What is most important for our purposes is the fact that the Minoans served as the cultural foundation for developments in the Mycenaean world.

The Minoans also served as important conduits for the transmission of Near Eastern and Egyptian cultures to Mycenaean Greece. The famous sphinx in later Greek mythology that terrorized the city of Thebes before Oedipus correctly solved its riddle appeared early in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Minoan Crete. In the earlier contexts the sphinx probably was viewed as a guardian spirit, but in the later Greek adaptation of the creature it became a destructive demon wreaking havoc on Theban territory.¹² Lapis lazuli cylinder seals with Near Eastern cuneiform inscriptions and motifs have also been discovered in

Thebes. The seals may have been diplomatic gifts or were intended to be reused as raw material by the palatial workshops. Another indication of contact between Crete and Thebes during the Bronze Age comes in the form of large stirrup jars that show direct trade between the two regions. These transport containers, many of which have Linear B inscriptions, carried olive oil produced in western Crete to Thebes; over one hundred and twenty were found in a storeroom in the palace of Thebes.¹³ These few examples demonstrate the importance of Crete to the cultural and economic development of Thebes in the Bronze Age.

The Minoans of course were at the forefront in establishing early trade networks throughout the eastern Mediterranean. One of the most famous examples of this exchange network has been the discovery of Minoan-style frescoes at the palace center of Avaris (modern Tell el-Dab'a) in northern Egypt.¹⁴ Typical Minoan motifs were painted on wet plaster applied to Egyptian palace walls. Because of the different climate in Egypt the plaster did not adhere well and eventually the composition had to be discarded. Nevertheless, the fact that Minoan-style wall decorations appear in Egyptian contexts speaks to important diplomatic and cultural exchange in the Late Bronze Age. This exchange clearly flowed both ways. The Minoans were able to import diverse luxury items and precious raw materials such as gold and ivory, which were used to legitimize local political and social hierarchies. Some recent scholarship has questioned the traditional view of a rigid Minoan palace hierarchy in the earliest stages of the Minoan period, arguing instead for the concept of "heterarchy," which denotes authority from multiple sources or groups.¹⁵ Nevertheless, at the height of the Minoan cultural flowering, monarchy seems to have been the predominant form of political power in the Aegean.

Cnossus was the largest palace center on Crete. Arthur Evans, the excavator of Cnossus in 1900 CE, designated the earliest complex the "Palace of Minos." This early palace was built around 1900, but had to be rebuilt around two hundred years later after a devastating earthquake. The size of the rebuilt palace was monumental and indicates that Cnossus was a major center of power on Crete. It may have even had influence beyond the island. One example of the spread of Minoan influence in the Aegean comes from the island of Thera (modern Santorini), which was destroyed by a volcanic eruption around 1628. The city of Akrotiri on Thera was buried in a layer of volcanic ash, thus preserving valuable information about the settlement. Frescoes from Akrotiri show the influence of Minoan styles and motifs, which include depictions of Egyptian flora and fauna. But the settlement also reveals local characteristics in urban planning, architecture, and overall material culture. Due to its location just north of Crete, it is not surprising that a strong

Minoan influence appears in Thera; nevertheless, the mixture of styles demonstrates the complex nature of cultural transmission.

One of the most prominent images of Minoan wall painting not appearing in Thera is bull-leaping. The most famous depiction of this Minoan activity, which may have had ritual significance, was unearthed in Knossos. In the bull-leaping fresco from Knossos a bull takes center stage as a youth somersaults over its back while one youth stands in front and another stands behind the bull. Much has been made of the skin tones of the youths: the standing youths are light colored and the somersaulting youth is brownish red. This probably indicates a gender distinction: light or pale skin frequently denotes female, and darker skin male. Alternatively, some scholars have argued that the bull-leaping scene visually narrates a rite-of-passage ritual, whereby a youth becomes a man through the perilous act of leaping over the bull. Again, without contemporary textual information it is almost impossible to confirm or deny these divergent interpretations. The most that can be said with certainty is that the bull was a central feature in Minoan iconography.

In later Greek myth the bull was closely associated with the island of Crete. In the story of the Phoenician princess Europa, Zeus took the form of a bull to whisk away the royal maiden to the island of Crete, where he made love to her and sired Minos. When Minos grew up and competed for the kingship, he prayed to Poseidon to send him a bull from the sea. The bull was so beautiful that Minos refused to sacrifice it, which enraged Poseidon who in turn caused Minos's wife Pasiphae to fall in love with the bull. Pasiphae was so determined to fulfill her desire that she had the royal craftsman Daedalus construct a hollow wooden cow she could climb into to have sex with the bull. From this union Pasiphae gave birth to the Minotaur, a creature that was half-man and half-bull. In order to conceal this monstrosity, Minos had Daedalus construct the maze-like labyrinth.¹⁶ Athenian stories add that Minos demanded an annual tribute from Athens of seven boys and seven girls to be given to the Minotaur as a sacrifice. Famously, Theseus was sent as one of the youths, successfully killed the Minotaur, and freed Athens from Minoan oppression.¹⁷ What historical reality, if any, lay behind these stories is difficult to determine. Minos may have been a royal title on Crete rather than the name of an actual king. And the story of the labyrinth probably comes from later reflections on the massive maze-like ruins of the palace of Knossos that was not rebuilt after the widespread destructions in the eastern Mediterranean around 1200. Mycenaean Greeks did eventually take over Crete, but it is not clear that Athenians spearheaded this conquest: Mycenae would be just as likely a candidate because of its location and importance in the Late Bronze Age. Although there are problems in using Greek myths as historical documents, particularly because they were written down centuries later and were

primarily religious in nature, these stories provide much needed narratives about Mycenaean Greece.

Mycenaeans

Mycenaean settlements were much smaller than Minoan cities, especially Knossos, but they were more heavily fortified with massive walls and formidable citadels built on rocky outcroppings. The single biggest difference between Minoan cities and Mycenaean cities was that Minoan settlements did not require walls because of their island location: urban sites such as Knossos could expand to great proportions, whereas Mycenaean settlements were always vulnerable to overland attacks. The Mycenaean Greeks adapted to their natural landscape and the constant threat of attack. The extant walls from Mycenae have provided the best example of the monumental walls built during the Mycenaean Age: the walls were so imposing that later Greeks called them Cyclopean because they imagined only the gigantic Cyclopes could have built them.



Figure 1.5 Mycenaean walls and lion gate at Mycenae

Because the Minoans did not fortify their cities, there is the tendency to see the Minoans as more peaceful than the Mycenaeans. Minoan iconography seems to support this view because it lacks the warlike imagery of the Mycenaeans. Again, however, we should be cautious of reading the material culture too literally. These self-representations may be compared to two

different groups in the ancient Near East. Babylonian culture generally did not have scenes of war in their iconography, yet Babylonians were just as warlike and militaristic as their northern neighbors the Assyrians. Without a doubt, the palace centers on Crete were no different than other kingdoms in the Bronze Age, military force would have been a necessary component of building up and maintaining state power.

Although there was a wall around Mycenaean Thebes very little of it survives. A portion of the recently renovated Archaeological Museum of Thebes sits atop a small section of the foundation of the Mycenaean wall, which gives some idea of its construction. At the height of its occupation in the Mycenaean Age, the city of Thebes may have covered some twenty-eight hectares and had a population of fifty-six hundred people.¹⁸ The remnant of the Mycenaean wall at Thebes reminds us that it was imperative for the inhabitants to protect themselves against outside attacks.

The foundation myth for Thebes also shows us that it was a monumental and violent undertaking to found a city. After Zeus abducted the Phoenician princess Europa, her brother Cadmus was sent to find her. Unsuccessful in his search, he went to the oracle of Delphi where he received the divine message to give up the search for his sister and found a city. Cadmus was instructed to follow a cow with unique markings until the cow became exhausted and wherever the lumbering animal lay down would be the site of the new settlement. After leaving the sacred oracle, Cadmus headed east through what would become known as Boeotia, literally “land of cattle-pastures” – Boeotia was ideal for livestock with its rich alluvial fields. As soon as the cow lay down at the future site of Thebes, Cadmus ordered his followers to fetch water from a nearby spring that was sacred to Ares. Unbeknownst to Cadmus a serpent was guarding the water and when Cadmus’s men tried to draw water from the spring the serpent killed most of his men. Out of revenge Cadmus rushed to the spring and killed the serpent. He then received divine instructions to sow the serpent’s teeth in the fertile earth, which almost immediately issued forth armed men known as the Sown Men (*Spartoi*) who began slaying one another until few remained. With the survivors Cadmus established the settlement of Thebes.¹⁹ Thus, according to later Greeks it was a monumental and heroic struggle to found the city of Thebes.



Figure 1.6 Foundation of Mycenaean wall at Thebes



Figure 1.7 Foundation of Mycenaean wall at Thebes

One of the most significant aspects of this mythic story is that Cadmus was Phoenician and not Greek. The root of his name most likely means “Easterner,”²⁰ which undoubtedly reflects the trading ties the Greeks continually had in the eastern Mediterranean: the Near Eastern cylinder seals

found at Thebes mentioned earlier support this close connection. But it is difficult to pin down a mythic figure like Cadmus to a particular time or place. According to most traditions Cadmus would have come to Greece in the Bronze Age; but later Greeks also credited him with bringing the Phoenician alphabet to Greece,²¹ a historical development most scholars would place in the eighth century. This came during a period of intense cultural interaction after the long period of the Greek Dark Age (1200–800). For most of the Dark Age Phoenician city-states were at the forefront in Mediterranean exploration and expansion, establishing trading posts and settlements as far away as Spain. Eventually the Greeks replaced the Phoenicians as the foremost traders and colonizers in the Mediterranean, but their cultural debt to the Phoenicians forever remained.

The story of Cadmus is a prime example of the chronological and cultural inconsistencies in Greek tradition. He simultaneously functioned as a founder of Mycenaean Thebes and a conveyer of invaluable cultural material during the Greek Renaissance (800–700). Most Greek myths were a combination of stories from different times and places; the various strands of oral and written tradition were important elements in creating an overall cultural identity: inconsistencies and contradictions were a natural consequence of a tradition that developed over centuries of intense interaction with other cultures.

One of the most important aspects of the legend of Cadmus was that it provided Thebes with a connection to the ancient cultures of the Near East. The acropolis in Thebes was named after him, and he was thought to have built a major palace, aptly called the House of Cadmus. Archaeologists have uncovered remains of what appear to be palatial structures on the Cadmea.²² However, later Greek myths have too often informed modern excavations and interpretations of buildings on the Cadmea – it is possible that not all Mycenaean buildings on the Cadmea were part of the palace complex.²³ Many of the academic debates concerning Mycenaean Thebes will be difficult to resolve because large-scale excavations are not possible in the modern city. But the currently available archaeological evidence from Mycenaean Thebes clearly indicates that the city was one of the foremost powers of mainland Greece. The numerous Linear B tablets and rich material culture found on the Cadmea clearly indicate that a major Mycenaean palace controlled vast resources and had extensive trade networks throughout the eastern Mediterranean.



Figure 1.8 Reconstructed wall painting from a monumental chamber tomb at Thebes (1300–1200 BCE)

Elaborate chamber tombs outside the Cadmea provide additional information about the Theban elite during the Mycenaean period. One tomb in particular was decorated with a wall painting of well-dressed women similar to other examples in the Bronze Age Aegean, and demonstrates the importance of using artistic production to project wealth and power. Another object found in an elite burial was an ivory cosmetic case depicting two sphinxes that are stylistically similar to Near Eastern examples. Other frescoes found on the Cadmea portray hunting scenes, various flora and fauna, possible depictions of figure-of-eight shields, and a soldier.²⁴

One intractable problem concerning Thebes involves its famous seven gates: particularly the names, locations, and historicity. These gates played a central role in the famous myth of the Seven against Thebes.²⁵ In this story, the sons of Oedipus – Eteocles and Polynices – engaged in bloody civil war over the kingship of Thebes. Initially they agreed to alternate every year, but after his first year as king Eteocles refused to give up his authority.²⁶ This compelled his brother Polynices to enlist the help of military forces from Argos to drive his brother from power. In the ensuing conflict, leaders fought in single combat against one another in front of the seven gates – tragically Eteocles and Polynices killed one another fighting before one of the gates. The seven gates of Thebes thus served as a reminder of the internecine strife of the Mycenaean Age: both within the city of Thebes and between Greek cities. The legend of the Seven against Thebes may have been developed to match the seven gates of

Thebes, if in fact there had been seven gates in the Mycenaean Age.²⁷ It is also possible that the motif of seven besiegers was borrowed from the Near East.²⁸ As with all of our textual evidence for the legends and stories about Mycenaean Thebes, the sources come from much later periods.



Figure 1.9 Ivory cosmetics container with sphinxes from Thebes (1300–1200 BCE)

The seven attackers failed to take Thebes, but their sons – the so-called Descendants – made another attempt a generation later and succeeded. Sthenelus – one of the sons of the original Seven against Thebes – boasts in the *Iliad*, “We declare that we are far better men than our fathers. We took the abode of seven-gated Thebes when we led fewer men beneath a better wall,

trusting in the signs of the gods and in the help of Zeus.”²⁹ According to tradition, the second successful attack on Thebes occurred just before the Trojan War. Similar to the archaeological record from Troy, one of the destruction levels from Thebes occurred around 1200.³⁰ Although this does not confirm the particular details of later myths, it indicates a period of great upheaval that could provide abundant material for later storytellers.

After Homer the next major source to discuss the seven gates of Thebes is the Athenian tragedian Aeschylus. In his *Seven against Thebes* produced in 467, Aeschylus has a scout describe the warriors stationed at each of the seven gates.³¹ Later authors provide a variety of additional names for the seven gates, once again demonstrating the diverse nature of the Greek literary tradition.³² What is most important about the tradition of seven-gated Thebes is that it represents tremendous power and prestige. No other mainland fortifications had seven gates – Mycenae only had two gates, the famous lion gate and a small postern gate. Because of the scant archaeological evidence for the gates and walls of Thebes, however, scholars have not been able to prove that Thebes actually had seven gates at any point in its history.³³ But if Mycenaean Thebes did have seven gates it would have required considerable personnel to build and protect so many entry points into the city.

In addition to providing robust defense for a city, gates and walls were monumental display pieces kings used to intimidate and impress their enemies and subjects. Similar to rulers throughout the Near East and Egypt, Theban kings probably relied on a combination of independent and dependent laborers to build the city’s fortifications. Linear B tablets from Thebes refer to an official who may have been an overseer of the people, possibly a foreman for large-scale projects. There are also references to the name Thebans, which points to an early collective identity for the people of the city.³⁴ The tremendous resources of the palace would have been able to support a large labor force that ultimately built a lasting legacy for the city. The gates and walls of Thebes provided security and employment, but pride as well.



Figure 1.10 The name for Thebans (*te-qa-jo-i*) on the top half of a Linear B tablet

This is not to underestimate the high level of state compulsion. Linear B tablets reveal that similar to labor forces in the Near East and Egypt, Mycenaean Greeks had dependent populations supported by redistributive economies. The palace probably supplied the majority of the workers; but, particularly during times of dire threats to the city's security, all available manpower would have been called upon to help fortify the city. In the late Mycenaean Age, the fortifications at Mycenae, which provide the best preserved evidence, were continually expanded and strengthened, undoubtedly a result of increasing concern about attacks. Even though the Seven against Thebes failed to take the city, their sons eventually were successful and stormed seven-gated Thebes. The later legends enshrined in Greek literature may not be accurate historical accounts of Thebes in the Late Bronze Age, but they certainly help give a sense of the great power and ultimate demise of Mycenaean Thebes.

Notes

- 1 For a critique of the traditional view of the Mycenaean economy as

- redistributive, see Nakassis et al. 2011 and the forum in the *American Journal of Archaeology* 115, no. 2 (2011): 175–244.
- 2 These objects can be seen at the recently renovated Archaeological Museum of Thebes, sections nos. 4–5. I would like to thank Vassilis Aravantinos for his help in making my visit to the Archaeological Museum of Thebes a very rewarding experience.
- 3 Bennet 2013, 249–250.
- 4 Hdt. 7.9b.1.
- 5 Plut. *Mor.* 193E.
- 6 See Map 3 Battle sites in central Greece.
- 7 Translation (slightly adapted): Frayne 1993, 29.
- 8 Symeonoglou 1985, 63; Bennet 2007, 187; 2013, 244–245.
- 9 Beckman et al. 2011; Kelder 2010; 2012.
- 10 For the suggestion that Thebes was the capital of Ahhiyawa, see Latacz 2004, 242–243. At the very least Thebes seems to have controlled territory beyond Boeotia, its regional center of power in later periods: Del Frio 2009.
- 11 Cf. Hdt. 3.122.2; Thuc. 1.4.1, 1.8.2–3.
- 12 Hes. *Theog.* 326–327; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.8.
- 13 Archaeological Museum of Thebes, section no. 5.
- 14 Bietak 2013; Chapin 2014, 27–28.
- 15 Bennet 2013, 239.
- 16 Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.1.
- 17 Apollod. *Epit.* 1.7–11.
- 18 Symeonoglou 1985, 63; Bennet 2007, 187; 2013, 244–245.
- 19 Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.4.1–2.
- 20 Berman 2015, 15.
- 21 Cf. Hdt. 5.58.1–2.
- 22 For a recent overview with earlier bibliography, see Aravantinos 2015.
- 23 Dakouri-Hild 2010, 698–699. Cf. Symeonoglou 1985.
- 24 Dakouri-Hild 2010, 700.
- 25 Aesch. *Sept.*; Eur. *Phoen.*; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.
- 26 Cf. Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.1.
- 27 Cf. Berman 2015, 23.
- 28 Burkert 1992, 106–114; West 1997, 455–457.
- 29 *Il.* 4.405–408. In the earlier attack on Thebes, Zeus had destroyed Sthenelus’s father Capaneus with a thunderbolt when the latter climbed the wall and boasted that not even Zeus could stop him.
- 30 Aravantinos 2015, 23.
- 31 Aesch. *Sept.* 375–632.
- 32 For helpful lists, see Symeonoglou 1985, 35; Berman 2015, 162–163.

- 33 Symeonoglou 1985, 32–34; Pharaklas [1996] 1998, 7–8; Berman 2015, 22–23.
- 34 Archaeological Museum of Thebes, section no. 5.

2 Dark Age and Renaissance Thebes (1200–700 BCE)

The collapse of Mycenaean society in Greece left an indelible mark on the collective psyche of the region as well as the archaeological record. Cities like Thebes were burned to the ground, monumental fortifications and buildings were left in ruins, populations dwindled, and writing disappeared. As a result, some of the best evidence for central Greece in the Dark Age (1200–800) comes from burials.¹ The most famous burial complex of the period comes from Lefkandi – on the nearby island of Euboea – and is dated to around 950. Here archaeologists uncovered an elite burial that included both cremation and inhumation: a cremated warrior with martial paraphernalia was buried in the same grave as an inhumed woman, most likely his wife; in the adjacent grave were two pairs of horses, possibly those of a chariot team. Despite lacking the splendor of the Mycenaean era, this burial complex demonstrates that elite warrior status continued to be an important aspect of Dark Age Greece. The burial at Lefkandi also reveals the importance of trade contacts with the Near East, even though it was on a much-reduced scale. The warrior's ashes had been placed in a bronze amphora made in Cyprus about a century before the burial; and the woman wore a necklace thought to have been made in the Near East over six centuries earlier.²

Scholars continue to debate the exact cause of the widespread destructions that brought about a Dark Age in Greece.³ Most likely a variety of factors contributed to the collapse. Natural disasters such as earthquakes and crop failures may have played a role, but they were always a feature of the region. Invasions and migrations may also have played a critical role in weakening state structures and cutting off the Mycenaean world from trade routes in the eastern Mediterranean. But the single most important factor was probably the inherently unstable palatial and redistributive structure of Mycenaean states. Cities like Thebes proved unable to adapt to changing circumstances in Greece. The basic structure of these cities may have sown the seeds of their own destruction with an ever-increasing concentration of wealth and power with

extreme disparities between the elite and masses. The final razing of the cities may have included both foreign invaders and disaffected members of the community. We may never know the exact combination of factors that precipitated the end of the Late Bronze Age, but Greece was never the same.



Figure 2.1 Amphora from Thebes (1000–900 BCE)



Figure 2.2 Skyphos from Thebes (1000–900 BCE)

When communities rebounded in the Greek Renaissance (800–700), the Greek city was a very different entity. During this time, the Greeks created a new form of writing derived from the Phoenician alphabet. In contrast to Mycenaean Linear B, which was only used for accounting records, one of the earliest pieces of evidence for the Greek alphabet comes from a small clay cup inscribed with hexameter verse. This drinking cup has been dubbed Nestor’s cup because of its inscription that reads, “I am the good drinking cup of Nestor, whoever drains this cup, immediately the desire of beautiful-crowned Aphrodite will seize him.”⁴ The Greek alphabet spurred a veritable explosion of creative output, most notably the Homeric epics the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These monumental poems crystallized a particular worldview that remained the essence of Greek literature throughout antiquity. During the Dark Age in Greece, poets and communities relied on oral tradition to pass on the larger-than-life deeds of Mycenaean Greeks. However, along the way elements of Dark Age society became integral to the epics: the village chief (*basileus*), the people as both territory and collective group, the self-contained household, and guest friendship were key elements that would remain fundamental aspects of Greek society. The Homeric epics also included aspects of the Greek Renaissance, such as hero worship, colonization, and Panhellenism. Homeric society was thus a literary fiction that reflected centuries of historical development from the Mycenaean Age through the Dark Age and into the Greek Renaissance.

In a way the Homeric epics may be viewed as a centuries-long attempt by later Greeks to understand the world of the Mycenaean Greeks. Yet, the best textual evidence for understanding the collapse of Mycenaean society comes from outside Greece. Cuneiform tablets from Syria-Palestine written in the early twelfth century reveal a significant increase in marauders and attacks on fortified cities. At this time, the last king of the Syrian city of Ugarit sent the following message to the king of Cyprus:

Father, the ships of the enemy have been coming. They have been burning down my villages and have done evil things to the country. Does my father not know that all my troops [and chariots] are in Hatti and that all my ships are in Lukka? They have not yet reached me, so the country is undefended. May my father be informed of this. Now the seven ships of the enemy that came have done evil things. If other enemy ships appear, send me a message so that I know.⁵

Ugarit was soon destroyed like many other cities in the eastern Mediterranean. Even Hattusa the capital of Hatti (i.e., the Hittite kingdom) was sacked, bringing an end to one of the largest and most powerful kingdoms in the Late Bronze Age.

The fates of Ugarit and Hattusa were indicative of the widespread destructions. The most famous statement about the unrest in this period, however, comes from an Egyptian inscription, in which Rameses III proclaimed:

The foreign countries conspired in their islands. All at once the lands were removed and scattered in the fray. No land could resist their arms, from Hatti, Kode, Carchemish, Arzawa, and Alashiya on – being cut off at one time. A camp was set up in Amurru. They desolated its people, and its land was like that which had never existed. They were coming forward toward Egypt, while the flame was prepared for them. Their confederation was the Peleset, Tjeker, Shekelesh, Denen, and Weshesh, lands united. They laid their hands upon the lands as far as the circuit of the earth, their hearts were confident and trusting: “Our plans will succeed!”⁶

Not all cities and regions in the eastern Mediterranean were completely destroyed. Rameses III was able to defeat the foreign coalition, but Egypt thereafter slipped into a long period of decline.

There has been tremendous interest in determining who exactly these people were that helped bring about the collapse of the major powers in the Late Bronze Age. Egyptian sources call them the Sea Peoples. Scholars have tried to match the specific names to groups of people known in other sources. From the

Greek literary tradition, the various names have tenuous connections with certain groups. The Peleset may refer to the Pelasgians; the Tjekker to Teucer, a Trojan who founded a settlement on Cyprus; the Shekelesh to Sicilians; the Denen to Homer's Danaan, one of several names for Greeks; and the Weshesh may refer to Wilusa, another name for Troy. All of these connections are speculative, however. Alternatively, the names have been connected to biblical names. The Peleset may refer to the Philistines; Tjekker to Acre, a city in Israel; Shekelesh to Issachar; Denen to the tribe of Dan; and Weshesh to the tribe of Asher. There is no certainty in any of these connections, and they depend largely on a scholar's academic discipline and how important it is to confirm the later literary tradition. Most ancient historians would not give too much credence to these onomastic similarities, but the search for the origins and the places eventually inhabited by the Sea Peoples demonstrates the importance of ethnic identity past and present.

To be sure the end of the Bronze Age was a period of social upheavals and migrations. Cities, kingdoms, and empires were destroyed and large groups of people moved from place to place in search of more prosperous conditions. Despite the chaos, or because of it, new identities were formed but not before a considerable amount of time elapsed. The Greek historian Thucydides – writing some eight hundred years later – describes his view of the situation:

Even after the Trojan War, Greece was still engaged in migrations and settlements, so that by not remaining quiet it could not grow. The return of the Greeks from Ilium [i.e., Troy] after a long time caused many political changes; and for the most part factions were formed in cities, from which those driven into exile founded [new] cities. In the sixtieth year after the capture of Ilium, the present-day Boeotians were driven out of Arne by the Thessalians and settled in present-day Boeotia – they colonized what before was called Cadmean land (although there was a division of them in this land before, some of whom joined the expedition to Ilium). In the eightieth year, the Dorians with the sons of Heracles took control of the Peloponnesus.⁷

Thucydides imagines that the Boeotians already had a collective identity before they came to Boeotia, and that some Boeotians were living in central Greece before the collapse of the Mycenaean world.⁸ Frequently, families, cities, or whole ethnic groups fostered connections with the Mycenaean Age in order to establish legitimacy, even if there was no historical basis for the claims.

In the famous catalogue of ships in book two of the *Iliad*, Homer mentions Boeotia first and describes it in greater detail than any other region; he also

says the Boeotian ships had the largest crews of any in the expedition to Troy. However, in his list of major Boeotian towns and cities, Homer refers to Hypothebes – literally “Lower Thebes” – instead of Thebes, which probably indicates that the population no longer occupied the acropolis.⁹ This was reflected in myth in that the sons of the Seven against Thebes sacked Thebes prior to the Trojan War; the archaeological record also reveals that the Thebans did not reoccupy the Cadmea during the Dark Age. Those that survived the destruction of Thebes created a small settlement just to the north of the Cadmea. Sarantis Symeonoglou states:

This area was virtually uninhabited in the Mycenaean period and could therefore accept a new settlement. The settlers would not have had to confront the problem of cleaning up and terracing the debris that wars had left on the Kadmeia; at the same time, they would have had the advantage of taking easily accessible building materials, especially stone, to construct a protective wall.¹⁰

Despite the limited evidence, it seems clear that the Thebans built a wall around this smaller settlement and reserved the Cadmea for burying their dead. This would have been a way to maintain a connection to the venerable past. The Thebans living in the post-palatial period were not able to build monumental buildings, but they could sanctify the area with a cemetery.

The Dark Age tombs unearthed on the Cadmea show both continuity and change in the burial practices of the Mycenaean period. Symeonoglou adds, “The period following the collapse of palatial Thebes is one of the most poorly documented in the city’s history. Evidence from the tombs indicates that habitation continued, but the size of the city was drastically reduced.”¹¹ In the Mycenaean Age, the Thebans used chamber tombs cut from the surrounding sandstone hills. According to Symeonoglou:

Theban chamber tombs are similar to those found elsewhere in the Mycenaean world: there is an approach, or *dromos*, cut in the hill slope, and an entry blocked by stones; the chamber itself is usually round or of irregular shape, although a surprisingly large number are rectangular.... Inside the chambers there are often pit graves; niches and benches are also cut from the living rock in the chamber walls.

However, Symeonoglou points out that “no tholos or stone-lined tombs of any kind have been found.”¹²

There were three main cemeteries outside the walls of Mycenaean Thebes. Even though grave robbers ransacked the tombs, significant amounts of pottery have survived and provide the basis for dating the various burials.

There are far more Mycenaean burials than Dark Age burials, which scholars frequently interpret as an indication of a major decline in population. However, there is disagreement on this issue.¹³ Looking at the archaeological evidence as a whole, there is little doubt that there was a significant decrease in the number of people living in Greece during the Dark Age.

The differences in the quality of burials clearly speak to a change in the prosperity between the two periods. One of the largest chamber tombs in Greece comes from Mycenaean Thebes, though the elite were buried in the same cemeteries as the rest of the population.¹⁴ This is in contrast to a city like Mycenae where large tholos tombs were built separate from other burial grounds. In general, Greek burial practices in the Mycenaean Age and the Dark Age show significant variability from region to region. This makes it difficult to make broad generalizations about the evidence. Practices even within the same site often do not show a recognizable pattern.

However, one of the major changes that occurred during the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Dark Age was the appearance of cremation. Oliver Dickinson writes:

The appearance of cremation as a minority rite at a wide range of sites is a notable feature.... The rite itself represents only a partial departure from traditional practice, in that except at Khania and Argos these cremations are found within traditional forms of tomb, alongside inhumations. The rite's widespread distribution implies a readiness on the part of some members of many different communities to adopt what was an essentially foreign custom, but whether this involved adopting new ideas about death and the afterlife remains questionable, although it is hard to believe that no ideological element was involved.¹⁵

From the Dark Age on Greek communities frequently practiced inhumation and cremation with no clear indication why one method was chosen over the other. The same tombs often contained both types of burial. Another significant feature of the Dark Age was the increasing use of single burials. In the Late Bronze Age tombs often contained multiple burials, especially the larger chamber tombs, which most likely were built for elite families. But with the drastic decline in populations and the overall poverty of the Dark Age, burials were much more simple affairs and no longer included rich grave goods.¹⁶ Mycenaean tombs were reused on occasion – reflecting the poverty of the successive period, but also perhaps a desire to maintain a connection to the past.

One of the major breaks with the past, however, was the advent of ironworking in the Dark Age. It used to be believed that the people who

destroyed the Mycenaean palaces brought iron technology to Greece; their iron weapons were thought to have given the invaders a distinct advantage over their bronze-wielding opponents. However, a significant number of iron weapons only appear in the archaeological record a couple of centuries after the collapse of the Mycenaean palaces. In twelfth-century eastern Mediterranean contexts, only a little more than three percent of the weapons and armor are iron. This number increases to twenty percent in the eleventh century, but only in the tenth century is iron weaponry more abundant than bronze – fifty-four percent iron compared to forty-six bronze.¹⁷ Thus, the real turning point came in the tenth century, over two centuries after the collapse of Mycenaean palaces.

It is clear now that ironworking was a response to the disappearance of Mycenaean administrative structures and their concomitant trade networks. In order to make bronze, craftsmen needed both copper and tin, the latter of which came from as far away as Mesopotamia, Spain, and northern Europe.¹⁸ With a dramatic decline in trade, craftsmen turned to working iron ore, which was more readily available. However, iron did not completely replace bronze. Bronze continued to be used for defensive armor. In later Greek history, sources frequently refer to heavily armed soldiers as “bronze men,” indicating the distinctiveness of their armor. Bronze breastplates, helmets, shields, and greaves (knee and shin guards) were all part of the essential military equipment worn by Archaic and Classical Greek warriors. Yet, such equipment was also used in the Mycenaean Age, which shows continuity between the different periods in Greek history. In particular, there is the famous Dendra panoply (ca. 1400) found near Mycenae. This bronze armor consists of a breastplate, backplate, shoulder guards, and skirt, all of which would have provided extensive coverage for the soldier. There has been disagreement about how mobile the warrior would have been, and whether the warrior fought from a chariot, in a mass formation, or as an individual champion. However, the Dendra panoply is not the only evidence for bronze armor in the Bronze Age. Ioannis Georganas points out:

Careful examination of finds from Thebes and of representations on pottery has shown that metal armors were quite common in the Bronze Age Aegean. Various metal artifacts found in the “Arsenal” of the palace at Thebes and dated to ca. 1300 BC have been identified as parts of metal armors. Among them was a pair of shoulder guards, which are smaller than those of the Dendra armor and lack the wide “wings” that cover the Dendra cuirass at the chest and back.... Such differences are clearly due to the development of this type of armor over time, indicating an evolution toward simpler forms that improved the warrior’s flexibility.¹⁹

By the time of the Warrior Vase (ca. 1200), soldiers are depicted with leather cuirasses and greaves.²⁰ There are other depictions that show warriors even wearing what appear to be linen greaves.

There was a similar trend toward lighter equipment in later Greek history as well. Greek armor appears to have been much more cumbersome in the Archaic Age than in the Classical Age. Over time Greek hoplites seem to have opted for lighter armament, at times even going into battle without the bronze breastplate, helmet, or greaves.²¹

Very little evidence for the Dark Age survives in the archaeological record. If warriors wore body armor and used shields, they were probably made of perishable materials like leather and wood. During this period, figural representations on pottery also disappeared, making it more difficult to reconstruct Dark Age warfare. Without the wealth and power of palaces or later city-states, armies were probably small and not well equipped. Local leaders very likely relied on ad hoc levies of small farmers, craftsmen, and merchants to protect the land and at other times conduct raids against vulnerable neighbors. In describing the earliest stages of Greek history, Thucydides writes,



Figure 2.3 Mycenaean panoply from Dendra near Mycenae (ca. 1400 BCE)

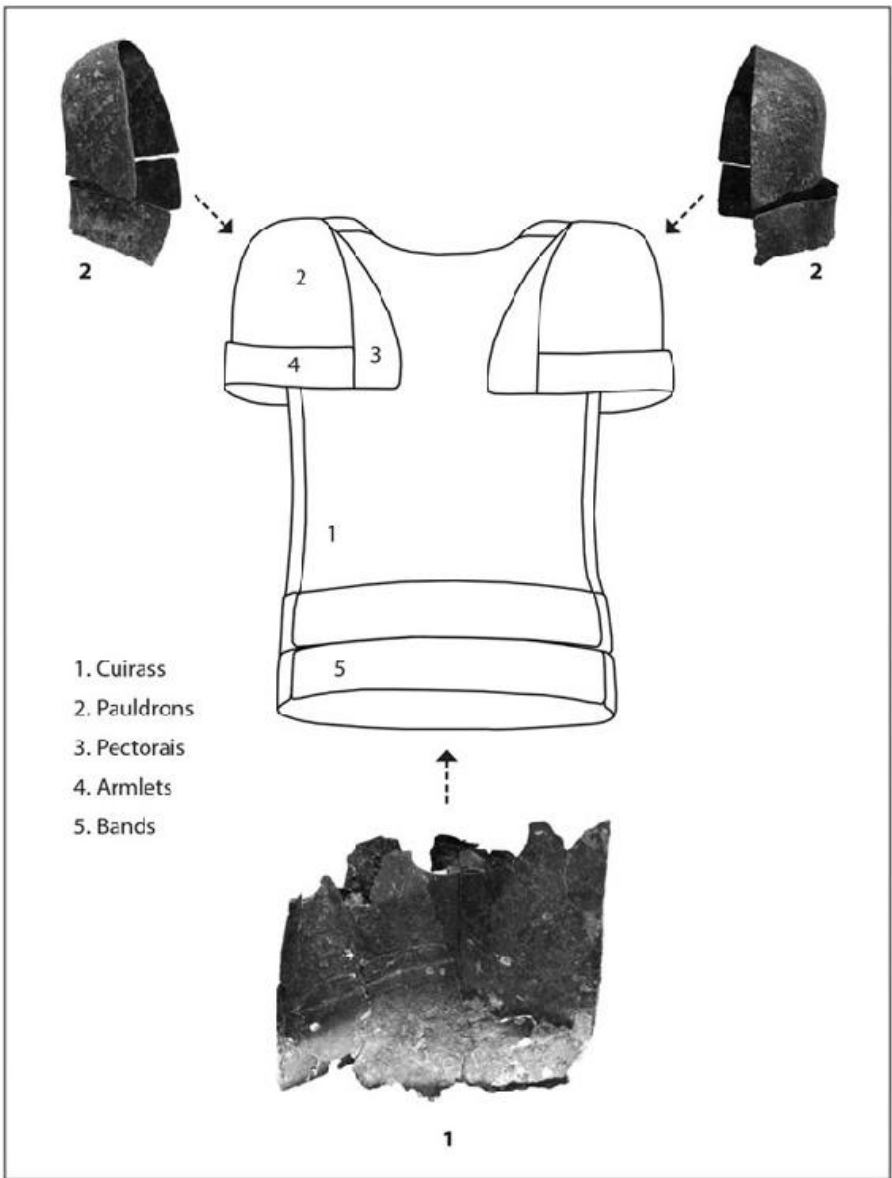


Figure 2.4 Components of Mycenaean panoplies from Thebes adapted from a display at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes (1500–1200 BCE)

Once upon a time the Greeks and barbarians who occupied the coast and islands turned to piracy as soon as they increased naval communication with one another, the most powerful men leading the way for their own profit and to support the weak. Attacking un walled cities consisting of villages, they plundered them and made most of their living from this – there was no disgrace yet from this type of work, rather it conferred even

some honor. Some of the present inhabitants of the mainland show that it is an honor for them to do this well, and the ancient poets in a similar way everywhere ask men arriving by sea if they are pirates – as if those who are asked the question would not deny their work nor would those who wanted to know reproach them. They plundered one another on land as well.²²

Acquisition through the use of military force was a constant feature of every period of Greek history. Although Greek states attempted to limit warfare with certain customs and rituals and sought to justify war based on the ideal of defending the homeland, most conflicts had a predatory aspect. Successful military feats conferred elite status on particular members of the community. In one of the clearest statements of this idea in the *Iliad*, Sarpedon proclaims to Glaucus:

Why are we honored above all with a seat of honor, meats, and filled goblets in Lycia, and all look upon us as gods, and we possess a large track of land along the banks of the Xanthus, good for an orchard or vineyard and wheat-bearing plowland? Therefore we must now go and stand with the foremost Lycians and partake of the raging battle, in order that one of the heavily armed Lycians may speak the following: “Truly our kings do not rule Lycia without glory, they eat fat sheep and drink excellent, honey-sweet wine; indeed they are strong and brave, since they fight among the foremost Lycians.”²³

In the immediate aftermath of the Mycenaean collapse a clearly defined elite is not necessarily visible in the archaeological evidence.²⁴ The instability and fluidity of this period may have provided opportunities for different members of the community to come to the fore. There are indications of local leaders at some sites. But, as Dickinson points out, “How much control any such ‘chiefs’ or elite had over the rest, how embedded social distinctions were, and whether it was easy or hard to rise in the social scale, remain questions beyond the capacity of the known settlement evidence to answer on its own.”²⁵ The Homeric epics often have been used to fill in the gaps left by the archaeological evidence. Thus, it has been thought that the society of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* provide some idea of what Dark Age society was like. As has been pointed out, however, the Homeric epics are an amalgamation of various time periods, so they need to be used with caution. But, because there is no textual evidence from Dark Age Greece and because the Homeric epics are the written sources closest in time to this period, it is reasonable to use this evidence in conjunction with the archaeological evidence.

Certain characteristics of the Homeric epics clearly set the action in the Late Bronze Age. The main weapons are made of bronze, even though there is an awareness of iron. Also, there are references to the boars' tusk helmets archaeologists have uncovered from Mycenaean contexts. And the heroes are mighty kings of large kingdoms and grand palaces. However, scholars argue that Dark Age society was very different from the Mycenaean Age. Here archaeology clearly shows that palaces no longer existed – society centered around small settlements and even smaller households. The latter were probably self-sufficient and did not engage in extensive trade as in the Late Bronze Age. The way kingship is depicted in the epics may also be a reflection of the unstable nature of leadership in the Dark Age. This is most clearly illustrated in the *Iliad* by the figure of Thersites. Even though he was not one of the elite leaders, he openly criticized them in assembly. His introduction paints him as a political and social inferior of leaders like Achilles and Odysseus: in book two Homer says, Thersites's

mind was filled with disorderly words to condemn the chiefs, all for nothing, hardly in good form, but he said whatever he thought would raise a laugh among the Argives. Thersites was the most disgusting man who went to Troy. His legs were bowed, one shorter than the other, and his shoulders curved inwards over his chest. His head was pointy and a scant tuft of hair grew on top. Achilles especially hated him, but also Odysseus, for Thersites constantly reviled these two men.²⁶

In one of the most famous episodes in the *Iliad*, Thersites severely criticized the selfish actions of Agamemnon. Thersites was in turn strongly rebuked and struck by Odysseus, but he apparently was generally free to speak his mind even though he was not an elite leader.

The other major era reflected in the Homeric poems is the Greek Renaissance (800–700), during which time Greece underwent major transformations. Populations greatly expanded, trade significantly increased, and strong cultural traditions were established, including the famous Olympic games.²⁷ One of the early Olympic victors, an athlete named Diocles from Corinth, played an important role in the history of eighth-century Thebes. Diocles's victory at Olympia is dated to 728, and according to Aristotle he was a friend and lover of a Corinthian lawgiver named Philolaus. At some point they both left Corinth and took up residence in Thebes – Diocles is said to have fled Corinth to avoid the advances of his incestuous mother. Aristotle states:

In fact, this was the reason they came to live with the Thebans and

Philolaus became their lawgiver. Among his laws there was legislation dealing with the procreation of children, which they call the adoption laws – this is a peculiar feature of his legislation, intended to preserve the number of family plots.²⁸

Philolaus and Diocles lived the rest of their lives in Thebes and eventually were buried in tombs that Aristotle says could still be seen in his day. Some historical truth may underlie this legendary material. Sarantis Symeonoglou writes, “In the Geometric period [ca. 900–700], Thebans seemed to prefer to bury their dead in pithoi, a custom more closely related to burial practices of the Peloponnese than to those in Attica.”²⁹

This Theban connection with the Peloponnesus became even more pronounced with the development of the cult of Heracles, whose parents were said to have been from Tiryns in the northeast Peloponnesus. They immigrated to Thebes where Heracles was born. Heracles combined elements of both a hero and a god.³⁰ Similar to many heroes he was born from the union of a mortal and a god – his mother was the mortal Alcmene and his father was Zeus.³¹ Because of this Zeus’s wife Hera had implacable hatred toward Heracles. When he was born Hera sent snakes to kill him in his crib; though a baby, Heracles miraculously strangled them to death.³² As a youth he led the Thebans in revolt against Minyan Orchomenus, which had imposed an annual tribute on Thebes; he defeated the Orchomenians in battle and forced Orchomenus to pay double the tribute the Thebans formerly paid.³³ Heracles eventually returned to the Peloponnesus where he undertook many of his famous labors. He also undertook labors at the ends of the inhabited world.³⁴

Another important divine figure in eighth-century Thebes was Apollo. An important temple was built to Apollo, who was given the epithet Ismenian because of a nearby river. The Theban sanctuary may have initially competed with Delphi as a major center for the worship of Apollo. In the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, the god visits Thebes as part of his tour through central Greece before finally settling on Delphi as his main religious center.³⁵ However, the sanctuary of Ismenian Apollo continued to be an important location for the worship of Apollo. Herodotus remarks that he saw tripods inscribed with Cadmean letters at this sanctuary. He adds that the letters resembled Ionian Greek letters. The creation of the Greek alphabet in the eighth century was perhaps the most spectacular achievement in Renaissance Greece. Derived from a west Semitic script known as the Phoenician alphabet, the Greek alphabet allowed a fully phonetic rendering of the Greek language with only twenty-four characters. The Near Eastern script of cuneiform and the hieroglyphs of Egypt were much more complicated writing systems, requiring highly specialized scribal traditions. The twenty-two characters of the

Phoenician alphabet made the script more accessible but the characters only represented consonants; the Greeks took the added step of representing vowels in their system. Herodotus says the Phoenicians

taught the Greeks many things, in particular the alphabet, which I believe the Greeks did not have until then – all the Phoenicians used it first. As time passed, they changed both the sound and the shape of the letters. At this time Ionian Greeks lived in many of the places around the Phoenicians and were taught the alphabet by them. After the Greeks changed a few of the letters, they put them to good use; but when they spoke of them, they called them Phoenician letters, which was only right since the Phoenicians introduced them to Greece.³⁶

Because there are no examples of the Greek alphabet before the eighth century, this is the most likely period for its introduction into Greece.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the early evidence for the Greek alphabet is its use in recording poetry. This is in direct contrast to all Linear B tablets from the Mycenaean Age, which were accounting records. Barry Powell, in fact, has argued that the sole catalyst for creating the Greek alphabet was to write down the Homeric epics.³⁷ Because of the nature of the evidence it is difficult to state definitively that this was the case, but it is clear that the alphabet was central to the development of Greek culture; it allowed a great variety of voices and genres to flourish in Greece. Powell writes,

The invention of the Greek alphabet c. 800 BC was the third most important invention in the long history of the human species after the discovery of fire in the primordial past, and the invention of writing itself c. 3400 BC in Mesopotamia. The Greek alphabet was the first writing that could be pronounced by a nonnative speaker. It is a technology that allows the recreation of a rough phonic equivalent of speech, even if you do not know the language. The Greek alphabet was the first system of writing capable of preserving Homer, and it seems to have been designed for this very purpose.³⁸

It is significant that Thebes did not participate in overseas colonization despite its size and legendary connection to the seafaring Phoenicians. This can partly be explained by the fact that it was never a major naval power: there were several natural harbors on the Boeotian coast, but Thebes occupied a central inland location in Boeotia and probably relied on internal colonization of the surrounding countryside as its population expanded. Like other cities throughout Greece, the population of Thebes greatly increased in the eighth century. The Thebans built a wall around the Cadmea and apparently no

longer used the area for burials.³⁹ Thebes would eventually develop into a major city again in the Archaic Age.

Notes

- 1 For a recent review of the different terms scholars have used for the Greek Dark Age, see Kotsonas 2016. Early Iron Age has become the preferred archaeological designation for the period. However, the term “Dark Age” accurately reflects the disappearance of writing in Greece for some four hundred years (1200–800). The names and approximate dates given to the successive pottery styles in this era are Late Helladic IIIC (1200–1100), Submycenaean (1100–1050), Protogeometric (1050–900), and Geometric (900–700). For a recent argument against the designation Submycenaean, see Papadopoulos et al. 2011. Scholars previously thought that a faster potter’s wheel and compass were first introduced in the Early Iron Age, which allowed for more finely crafted vessels with more precise geometric decoration. However, this has been disputed by John Bintliff who says, “Traditionally such pots were seen as benefiting from improved technology, a multiple brush attached to a compass, and a shift from a slow to a fast potter’s wheel. But there seems no change in the potter’s wheel and the compass already appears in final Mycenaean times” (Bintliff 2012, 225).
- 2 Pomeroy et al. 2014, 46–47. For further details, see Lemos 2009.
- 3 For discussions of the various explanations for the collapse, see Drews 1993; Cline 2014. For the archaeological evidence for destruction levels at Thebes, see Dakouri-Hild 2010, 698.
- 4 For Nestor’s cup, see Meiggs and Lewis 1988, no. 1; Whitley 2001, 100, 131–133; Pomeroy et al. 2014, 61; Powell 2014, 278. Heinrich Schliemann had earlier named a gold cup he discovered at Mycenae the Cup of Nestor because of its resemblance to a passage in the *Iliad* (11.632–637).
- 5 Translation: Beckman 1996, 27 reproduced with slight modification in Van De Mieroop 2007, 194.
- 6 Translation: Wilson 1969, 262 reproduced with slight modification in Van De Mieroop 2011, 251.
- 7 Thuc. 1.12.1–3. In antiquity, the Trojan War was usually dated around 1200. From an archaeological perspective, Troy VIIa destroyed in the 1180s seems the most likely candidate. For the development of ethnic identity in ancient Greece and the Mediterranean, see Hall 1997; 2002; McNerney 2014.
- 8 For a recent discussion and earlier bibliography on Boeotian ethnicity, see

Ganter 2014.

- 9 *Il.* 2.499–514. Cf. Strabo 9.2.32.
- 10 Symeonoglou 1985, 63.
- 11 Symeonoglou 1985, 60.
- 12 Symeonoglou 1985, 52. For a recent attempt to provide a stronger foundation for an absolute chronology of the Dark Age, see Toffolo et al. 2013.
- 13 For a discussion, see Dickinson 2006, 174–195.
- 14 Symeonoglou 1985, 54–56; Aravantinos 2015.
- 15 Dickinson 2006, 73.
- 16 Dickinson 2006, 181–183.
- 17 Drews 1993, 75.
- 18 The specific ratio to make bronze is nine parts copper to one part tin. This is seen most dramatically from the Uluburun shipwreck (ca. 1300), which contained this exact ratio of copper to tin ingots. For recent discussion of the Uluburun ship, see Goren 2013.
- 19 Georganas 2010, 310.
- 20 For a depiction of the Warrior Vase, see Dickinson 2006, 71.
- 21 Hanson [1989] 2009, 57–58.
- 22 Thucydides 1.5.1–3. Cf. Cic. *Rep.* 3.14.24; August. *De civ. D.* 4.4.
- 23 *Il.* 12.310–321.
- 24 Dickinson 2006, 74–75.
- 25 Dickinson 2006, 110.
- 26 *Il.* 2.211–277.
- 27 According to tradition the Olympic games were founded in 776. Olympia hosted athletic competitions every four years until the Roman emperor Theodosius abolished them in 393 CE. For the problematic nature of early Olympic victor lists and their implications for time-reckoning in antiquity, see Christesen 2007.
- 28 Arist. *Pol.* 1274b 1–5. Cf. 1265b 12–16.
- 29 Symeonoglou 1985, 94.
- 30 For discussion and earlier bibliography on the sanctuary of Heracles at Thebes, see Aravantinos 2014.
- 31 See Family Tree.
- 32 For the image of the infant Heracles strangling snakes on coins, see Kraay 1976, 111–113 with plates 19.354, 20.361–362.
- 33 Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.11.
- 34 Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5. There was also a tradition that Heracles established the first Olympic games: Pind. *Ol.* 10.24–77; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.7.2.
- 35 Cf. *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 225–228.
- 36 Hdt. 5.58.1–2. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 11.14.

- 37 Powell 1991. For an alternative argument, see Woodard 1997.
- 38 Powell 2014, 16.
- 39 Symeonoglou 1985, 88–89.

3 Archaic Thebes (700–479 BCE)

Thebes developed into a major regional power during the Archaic Age (700–479). Its history at the beginning of the period is obscure, but by the late sixth century it was the dominant city in Boeotia. In the early fifth century, like most Greek communities, Thebes became embroiled in the momentous Persian Wars – the historic clash between Greek cities and the Persian Empire. The Thebans initially fought against the Persians, but after Greek forces were defeated at Thermopylae in 480, the city of Thebes capitulated and joined the Persian side. Herodotus portrays the Thebans as willing Persian collaborators who provided invaluable logistical and military support to the foreign army. As in most Greek cities, a pro-Persian faction in Thebes sought to benefit from the Persian presence in Greece. In the final battle at Plataea in 479, Herodotus says the Thebans fought so fiercely on the side of the Persians that three hundred of their best soldiers died on the battlefield. This ignominious end for Archaic Thebes, however, was not the death knell for the city. Thebes rebounded in the Classical Age (479–323) and briefly became the leading city in fourth-century Greece.

During the Archaic Age, Thebes seems to have maintained a certain amount of political and social stability – there are no references to tyrants or civil strife in Archaic Thebes. Perhaps this is attributable to the early legislation of the Corinthian lawgiver Philolaus, or it may be that not enough material survives to give us a clear picture of actual political and social disruptions in Thebes. What does seem certain, however, is that Thebes was not a major participant in Greek colonization.¹ Cities such as Chalcis, Eretria, Corinth, and Athens played important roles in overseas trade and colonization, but they also experienced significant political and social turmoil in the Archaic Age. Chalcis and Eretria founded some of the earliest colonies, but they were central combatants in the Lelantine War, an early conflict involving allies on both sides that foreshadowed later large-scale wars in Greece. Both Corinth and Athens developed into major commercial and cultural centers, yet they both experienced significant periods of social upheaval and autocratic rule. Thebes,

on the other hand, did not engage in extensive overseas activities in this age and apparently avoided major socio-economic disruptions. The laws of Philolaus – “intended to preserve the number of family plots,” according to Aristotle – may have provided a stable foundation for Thebes’s development in the Archaic Age.² As Thebes’s population expanded it most likely turned to internal colonization of the surrounding countryside instead of establishing settlements abroad. Throughout its history, Thebes remained essentially a land power that relied on the sizeable manpower base of the city and its Boeotian neighbors to compete with Athens and Sparta for dominance in Greece.

However, the poet Hesiod (*fl.* ca. 700) – from the small Boeotian town of Ascra twenty kilometers west of Thebes – reveals that there was a problem with social inequality in Boeotia.³ In his *Works and Days*, Hesiod decries the “gift-devouring kings” and exhorts his brother to work rather than engage in unjust theft and bribery.⁴ This work often is seen as representing a middle-class ideology critical of entrenched aristocrats. He also mentions the legendary conflict involving Thebes during the Late Bronze Age. In discussing the great heroes preceding the Iron Age, Hesiod says, “Evil war and the terrible clash of battle destroyed them – some fighting over the flocks of Oedipus under seven-gated Thebes in the land of Cadmus, others sailing to Troy for beautiful-haired Helen over the great gulf of the sea in ships: there death’s end covered some of them.”⁵

Unfortunately, the limited archaeological evidence from Thebes rarely helps to complete the picture of what must have been a very vibrant and dynamic city during Hesiod’s lifetime. In fact, for the period from the Early Iron Age to the Late Roman Empire, Sarantis Symeonoglou states:

The archaeological remains of this period are even fewer and more poorly preserved than those of the Bronze Age for reasons that are easy to understand. Houses were generally built of mud-brick; whatever stone was used was invariably recycled in later construction. In common with people in other areas of Greece, the Thebans put their energy and resources into public buildings that were constructed with permanent materials, usually ashlar masonry. The stone from these buildings, however, was stripped for reuse during the Early Christian and medieval periods. Even in modern times, ancient stone has been much sought after for construction, and one can see numerous and varied ancient stones incorporated into modern churches. The deeply buried foundations of Classical buildings may survive, but in such a fragmentary state that one can but rarely determine the function of the structure.⁶

This nicely sums up the difficulty of reconstructing the history of ancient

Thebes from architectural remains. Symeonoglou goes on to say, “There is, however, abundant material from the cemeteries, and also objects that, although unearthed in illicit digging, can be traced to a Theban origin.”⁷ Increasingly burial sites were established farther and farther from the Cadmea, no doubt to accommodate a growing population and the construction of public buildings.⁸

Another major obstacle in reconstructing the ancient city of Thebes is the limited information about its walls and famous seven gates. Knowing when the walls were built and how extensive they were would give us some idea of how large and prosperous Thebes was at any given time. As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), there was a wall around the Cadmea in the Late Bronze Age – a small section of the foundation is on display below the Archaeological Museum of Thebes.⁹ After the collapse of Mycenaean society, the Thebans apparently built a modest circuit wall just north of the Cadmea.¹⁰ In the eighth century, the Thebans probably refortified the Cadmea, which may have enclosed an area of roughly twenty-five hectares and had a population anywhere from seventy-five hundred to ten thousand people.¹¹ Eventually a second wall was constructed around Greater Thebes as the urban population continued to expand. It is uncertain exactly when this wall was built but it most likely was constructed in the Classical Age. Sarantis Symeonoglou says,

When the wall was finally completed it proved to be a veritable wonder: the area protected was twelve times the size of the Kadmeia. The wall was 7,000 m long, encompassing an area of 328 hectares, enough to accommodate 100,000 people. One wonders what the original expectations of the builders were, because it is doubtful that the population of Thebes ever reached more than a quarter of this number.¹²

It is noteworthy that in 479 the Persian general Mardonius built a wooden fortification in Theban territory that according to Herodotus totaled just over 7,000 meters long.¹³ It is possible the Persian fortification provided a prototype for the wall around Greater Thebes.

As populations continued to expand in seventh-century Greece, there seems to have been an increase in military conflicts, with a new type of soldier – the hoplite – coming to the fore. There is archaeological evidence for hoplite equipment dated to the late eighth century, and ceramic representations soon follow.¹⁴ There is also a bronze offering to Apollo found near Thebes and dated to around the same period that may have depicted a hoplite warrior.¹⁵ The adoption of hoplite equipment and tactics by Greek warriors was perhaps the most important development in the seventh century, and it had a tremendous impact on society and politics.¹⁶ Hoplitcs provided their own weapons and

protective armor – the latter consisted of bronze helmet, breastplate, greaves, and large round shield. The Homeric epics give some intimation of the importance of heavily armed infantrymen fighting in ordered ranks.¹⁷ But only in the seventh century did hoplites come to dominate the Greek landscape.

Hoplites also served as mercenaries for foreign kings. According to Herodotus, the seventh-century Egyptian king Psammetichus I (664–610) employed both Carians and Ionian Greeks to defeat his rivals to the throne. Herodotus relates that Psammetichus received an oracle that he would exact revenge against competing rulers in Egypt with the help of bronze men from the sea:

Now he was deeply distrustful of this prediction that bronze men would become his allies. But not much later, some Ionian and Carian marauders were driven off course and were forced to land in Egypt. When they disembarked and put on bronze armor, one of the Egyptians – who had never seen men armed in bronze before – delivered a message to Psammetichus in the marshes that bronze men had come from the sea and were plundering the land. Realizing that the oracle had been fulfilled, he was friendly towards the Ionians and Carians and persuaded them to join him by promising great rewards. So he won them over, and in this way he deposed the rival kings with their help and that of Egyptian volunteers.¹⁸

Caria was a region in southwestern Anatolia that had close connections with the Greek world. Inscriptions from Egypt reveal that the Carians had adapted the Greek alphabet to create a script for their Anatolian language. The Greeks in turn possibly adopted certain military equipment from the Carians. As Herodotus says,

The Carians taught them how to fasten crests to helmets and place emblems on their shields; they were also the first to make handles for shields. Up until then, all who were accustomed to use shields carried them without handles, controlling them by a leather strap worn around the neck and left shoulder.¹⁹

If the handles Herodotus mentions were the armband and handgrip of the hoplite shield, the Carians created one of the most important pieces of military equipment for ancient Greek warfare. This double-grip distributed the weight of the heavy hoplite shield along the length of the arm, allowing the hoplite to keep control of his unwieldy shield. The massive shield – almost one meter in diameter – was the essential piece of equipment for a hoplite to fight in the ordered ranks of the phalanx: it not only provided protection for the individual carrying it, but it also partially covered the warrior to the left.²⁰

Another passage in Herodotus's *Histories* actually provides a direct connection between the Carians and Thebes. In the final year of the Persian Wars, Herodotus says a miraculous event took place at the Theban sanctuary of Ptoian Apollo.²¹ A representative of the Persians named Mys went to the precinct to consult the oracle with three Thebans, when

all of a sudden the prophet delivered the oracle in a barbarian language. The Theban attendants were amazed to hear barbarian speech instead of the Greek language and were at a loss how to handle the present circumstance. Mys, however, snatched from them the tablet they had brought to write down what the prophet was saying and told them that the prophet was speaking the Carian language.²²

Thucydides also mentions the Carians as a significant group in the Aegean. He claims they and the Phoenicians originally inhabited many of the islands and were successful pirates.²³

It is not certain that Carians were responsible for the creation of hoplite equipment, especially since there is clear evidence of heavily armed Mycenaean warriors.²⁴ Nevertheless, once the hoplite was established in Archaic Greece traditional power relations were changed forever. At first hoplites may have constituted only a small sector of the population, but with the development of a thriving middle class more individuals could afford the hoplite panoply.²⁵ As Aristotle clearly states, "As cities grew and became strong in those with heavy arms, the majority of people had a greater share in government."²⁶ In an extended passage, Aristotle remarks on the practical benefits of having a large middle class for political stability.²⁷ This large group of independent farmers, craftsmen, and merchants became the backbone of Archaic Greek communities. At first most of them were excluded from power because aristocratic families monopolized political offices and instituted high property qualifications, thus only wealthy and well-connected individuals could make decisions affecting the entire state.

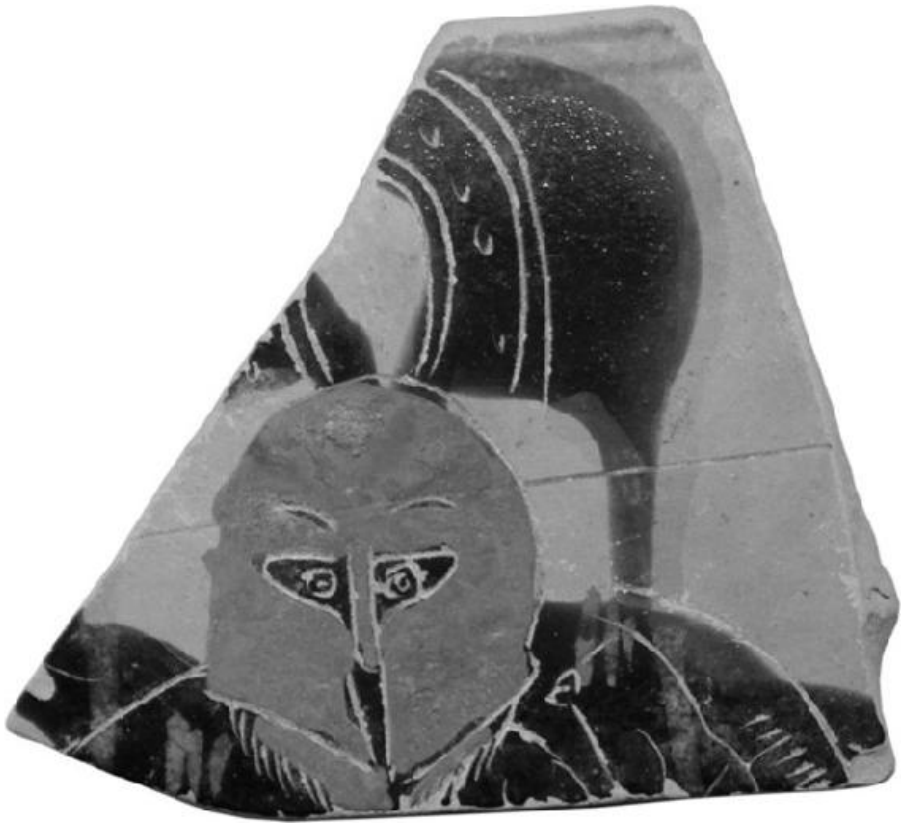


Figure 3.1 Hoplite on pottery fragment (550–500 BCE)

Aristocracies, however, were prone to factional strife, which often resulted in civil bloodshed and social instability. This situation left many communities vulnerable to internal and external threats. All of this contributed to the emergence in many Greek cities of autocratic rulers, traditionally called tyrants, who generally came from elite families but often appealed to non-elite groups to secure their power.²⁸ Leaders such as Cypselus of Corinth (ca. 657–627), Orthagoras of Sicyon who initiated the longest lasting tyranny in Archaic Greece (ca. 665–565), and Pisistratus of Athens (ca. 560–527) used their positions as military commanders to launch bids for absolute power in their cities. Antony Andrewes argued that tyrants generally relied on discontented hoplites to seize power, using the middle class in their role as hoplite soldiers to defeat their aristocratic opponents.²⁹ At the very least autocratic leaders were able to count on the acquiescence of local hoplite forces.³⁰ Herodotus records that Pisistratus actually relied on foreign mercenaries to gain control of Athens.³¹ Ultimately, individuals such as Cypselus, Orthagoras, and Pisistratus used their wealth, foreign military support, and swift action to gain the upper hand in factional infighting among the aristocracy. Part of the appeal

of autocratic leaders was the stability they brought to communities torn apart by civil strife. Another key was they tended to denounce their fellow aristocrats and enact programs that helped the middle and lower classes.³²

Although Thebes apparently avoided tyranny in the Archaic Age, the city was on friendly terms with several well-known tyrants. Cleisthenes – the Orthagorid tyrant of Sicyon (ca. 600–570) and grandfather of the Athenian democratic reformer of the same name – received from Thebes a sacred cult image of the Theban hero Melanippus. According to Herodotus, Cleisthenes was attempting to replace Dorian practices in Sicyon as part of a culture war against the nearby rival city of Argos.³³ Thebes also provided Pisistratus with a large sum of money for his final bid to take control of Athens.³⁴ Relations between cities frequently were based on self-interest and maintaining a balance of power in Greece. Certainly Greek communities operated along a wide spectrum ranging from brutal self-interest to altruistic benevolence; but the difficulty in fully appreciating the central role of self-interest in Greek decision-making comes from the well-articulated ideals of freedom and autonomy in the extant sources.

Because Dark Age communities were small, political and military functions were limited and not well developed. Very likely physically strong and charismatic leaders led small-scale raids and counter raids. These war leaders would have had political, social, and cultural prestige, but because populations were small and arable land was readily available there would have been little need to engage in extensive warfare. With increasing populations in the Greek Renaissance, communities would have sought to expand their control over borderlands. In fact, one of the first major wars we read about was fought over arable border territory, the Lelantine Plain between Chalcis and Eretria on Euboea.³⁵ This speaks to the fundamental importance of agricultural land to ancient cities. One of the earliest recorded instances of contested borderlands in the ancient world involved the Mesopotamian city-states of Lagash and Umma in a long conflict that revolved around the control of rich agricultural land between the two cities. After defeating military forces from Umma, Eannatum the king of Lagash (ca. 2450) set up a victory monument that has become known as the Stele of Vultures. It is arguably the earliest depiction of heavily armed infantrymen massed together in a phalanx-type formation, with soldiers trampling their foes underfoot as they methodically sweep the battlefield.³⁶

Mesopotamian city-states often went to war with one another over valuable agricultural borderlands. And although monarchy was the predominant form of government throughout the Near East, there is evidence that on occasion Near Eastern city-states relied on councils and assemblies to make collective decisions, which contradicts the modern dichotomy between eastern despotism

and western freedom.³⁷ A major difficulty in appreciating Greece's shared cultural heritage with the Near East and Egypt comes from ancient and modern formulations of Greek exceptionalism. For most Greek communities in the Archaic Age, however, there was a great desire to emphasize connections with the Near East and Egypt. This was most apparent in the art of the Orientalizing period (ca. 720–620), and Theban ceramic imports of the sixth century continued to reflect this cultural connection. Greek artists eventually forged a unique cultural identity, but it was within an eastern Mediterranean framework with strong connections to the ancient civilizations of the Near East and Egypt.



Figure 3.2 Corinthian vases imported to Thebes (600–500 BCE)

Thebes's chief political rival in sixth-century Boeotia was the city of Orchomenus, which had also been the site of a major Mycenaean palace center. A major tholos tomb comparable to the “Treasury of Atreus” at Mycenae had been built at Orchomenus. Pausanias declares that this Orchomenian tholos tomb was one of the greatest wonders anywhere.³⁸ According to tradition, Thebes at one time had to pay tribute to Orchomenus; but at some point in the mythological past, Heracles persuaded the young men of Thebes to fight for freedom and revolt from Orchomenus. According to Diodorus, when Orchomenian heralds came to receive the annual tribute from the Thebans, Heracles mutilated them and drove them from the city.³⁹ Then, with military equipment taken from temple walls that had been set up as dedications to the gods, he armed the citizen body because the Orchomenians “had disarmed the city so that the Thebans would not take up any thought of revolt.”⁴⁰ The Thebans decisively defeated the Orchomenians in the ensuing pitched battle

and then imposed twice the amount of tribute on Orchomenus.⁴¹

The major textual evidence for the intense rivalry between Thebes and Orchomenus generally comes from much later periods, and thus must be used with great caution.⁴² At some uncertain date in the sixth century, the Thebans had to repel a joint military action in Boeotia by Orchomenians and Thessalians.⁴³ In the same century, Orchomenus seems to have refused to contribute to minting a shared Boeotian coinage.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the sixth century was a major turning point for Boeotian collective identity. Based on epigraphic, numismatic, and later literary evidence, it was in this century that the Boeotians clearly began to see themselves as a distinct ethnic group. This did not get rid of local identities and allegiances, but it served as a foundation for collective action that eventually turned into a fully developed federal state in the Classical Age. Scholars disagree on the nature of the Boeotian association in the sixth century, depending on whether a scholar wants to emphasize political, military, or religious aspects. Hans Beck rightly points out that “those views coincide in the sense that they each foster an interpretation that prioritizes one aspect of integration in particular, whereas other facets of it are downgraded; sometimes those other facets are altogether dismissed or explicitly excluded.” He adds,

In many pre-modern societies, and in the dynamic network of developing *polis*-communities of Archaic Greece in particular, those developments all occurred simultaneously, and they were mutually interrelated. If various branches of integration are presented as isolated in scholarship, it should be kept in mind that such isolation is mostly a heuristic one, resulting from the practical organization of research. In “real life,” the distinction between tribal, cultic, or political registers is never as clear as the presentation of academic research suggests.⁴⁵

By the time of the Persian Wars, a clear Boeotian identity had developed, but this was after a long period of internal and external turmoil, with Thebes playing a central role in the process.

Starting in the late sixth century, Thebes attempted to impose its will on its immediate Boeotian neighbors. In 519 the Thebans began to pressure the Plataeans to submit to a collective Boeotian association.⁴⁶ The Plataeans refused and sought an alliance with Athens – smaller Greek cities often formed alliances with more powerful states such as Athens or Sparta in order to maintain their autonomy against their nearest neighbors. Herodotus claims that when the Thebans began putting pressure on the Plataeans, the latter at first appealed to the Spartans for an alliance but the Spartans refused, saying, “We live far away and any such assistance would be ineffective. You could be

enslaved many times before we heard anything about it. We advise you to submit yourselves to the Athenians – they are your neighbors and are not bad in helping to retaliate.” Herodotus then adds, “The Spartans gave this advice not so much out of goodwill towards the Plataeans as out of their wish to have the Athenians engaged in hostilities with the Boeotians.”⁴⁷

The Athenians and Boeotians did in fact become bitter enemies over the Plataean alliance. After accepting the Plataeans as subordinate allies, the Athenians marched into Boeotia and the Thebans responded by advancing into the field with their army. According to Herodotus,

When they were about to join in battle, the Corinthians would not allow it. They happened to be there entrusted by both sides with defining the boundary between them: The Thebans were to leave alone those of the Boeotians who did not wish to be part of the Boeotian federation. The Corinthians made these judgments and departed, but as the Athenians were leaving the Boeotians attacked them and were defeated. The Athenians then extended the boundaries, which the Corinthians had set for the Plataeans. They made the Asopus River the border between the Plataeans and Hysiaeans.⁴⁸

Athens’s interference in Boeotian affairs at this time is somewhat surprising since the Thebans had provided money for Pisistratus’s successful bid to become tyrant in Athens in 546.⁴⁹ Pisistratus’s sons – Hippias and Hipparchus – took control of Athens after his death in 527,⁵⁰ but may have continued to be on friendly terms with Thebes, which may have been the reason the Spartans encouraged the Plataeans to seek an alliance with Athens.⁵¹ Hippias and Hipparchus may have wanted to expand Athenian influence into central Greece and possibly saw this alliance as a first step to play a more direct role in Boeotian affairs. Plataea certainly was of prime strategic importance in the region, being situated along the main southern entry point into Boeotia. In a way Plataea could be seen as a borderland between Athens and Thebes as both cities expanded their spheres of influence in the late sixth century.

In 514 Hipparchus was assassinated in Athens and his brother Hippias apparently engaged in a reign of terror until 510, when Spartan forces invaded Athenian territory and successfully drove Hippias from power. This did not end the civil unrest in Athens, however, and in 508 the Spartans intervened again, supporting an oligarchic faction led by an Athenian named Isagoras. The Spartans drove out Isagoras’s chief rival Cleisthenes and his supporters, and took control of the Athenian acropolis. This caused a strong reaction from the Athenian people who rose up in armed insurrection and drove the Spartans and Isagoras’s faction from Athens. After this, Cleisthenes returned to Athens

and carried major reforms that laid the foundation for democratic government in Athens.

The Spartans, however, did not remain inactive. In 506 they launched another invasion into Athenian territory to restore Isagoras to power.⁵² The Boeotians participated in this campaign as allies of Sparta – the Thebans in particular were probably only too happy to exact revenge for the earlier Athenian interference in Boeotian affairs. As it turned out though, the Athenians again defeated the Thebans and their Boeotian allies. Textual and archaeological evidence confirms the Athenian victory.⁵³ Even though the Boeotians were defeated, this military action contributed to a developing Boeotian identity. Hans Beck states, “Without exception, the earliest epigraphic evidence for the *Boiotoi* stems from dedications that were made to commemorate military action.”⁵⁴ But as he and Angela Ganter correctly point out elsewhere, the process was complex and multidimensional, involving complex interactions between military, economic, political, and cultural factors.⁵⁵

After the Boeotians were defeated, the Thebans held an assembly to decide the next steps to take to exact revenge against Athens. The city sent a delegation to Delphi to consult the priestess of Apollo, who told the Thebans

there would be no vengeance for them from themselves alone. She urged them to deliver [the oracle] to the many-voiced and entreat their nearest. When the sacred delegates returned, they convened an assembly and delivered the oracle. When the Thebans learned from them that they should entreat their nearest, they said, “Don’t the Tanagrans, Coroneans, and Thespians live nearest to us? They always fight willingly on our behalf and wage war to the end with us. Why is it necessary to entreat them?”⁵⁶

Eventually the Thebans interpreted the oracle to mean that they should entreat those nearest with a mythological connection, which turned out to be the island of Aegina – Thebe and Aegina were the mythical daughters of the Asopus River. The powerful island state of Aegina was a bitter enemy of Athens but did not send troops. Rather, it dispatched sacred cult images to aid the Thebans in battle. With renewed confidence the Thebans attacked the Athenians at some unspecified location, but were defeated again. Following this second military defeat, the Thebans returned the sacred cult images to Aegina and asked for troops instead. Aegina did not send soldiers to Thebes, but it did attack Athens’s port of Phalerum causing considerable damage. There had been long-standing enmity between Athens and Aegina because of their close proximity and an intense maritime rivalry, so this gave the Aeginetans a welcomed excuse to ravage Athenian territory.⁵⁷

Mythological themes also play a central role in the work of the Theban poet Pindar. His main surviving works are victory odes celebrating athletic victors at the main Panhellenic games at Olympia, Delphi, Nemea, and Isthmia. Pindar's overall outlook is aristocratic in nature, and he relies heavily on mythology to connect elite families with the heroic past. Leaders of aristocratic families constantly sought ways to legitimize their position in society through displays of wealth and connections to other elite families inside and outside of Greece. Non-elites tried to emulate elite practices, but they also formulated opposing ideas that pushed for greater equality among the citizenry. The struggles in Athens in the late sixth century particularly point to competing ideologies among the Greeks who would soon face a far greater threat to their way of life.

The Persian Wars

In 499 Greeks in western Anatolia revolted from the Persian Empire. After five years of intense fighting, the Persians crushed what modern scholars call the Ionian Revolt (499–494).⁵⁸ In time the Persian Empire attempted to extend its control over mainland Greece. With the help of the exiled Athenian tyrant Hippias, Persian forces landed in Athenian territory in 490 but were decisively defeated at the battle of Marathon by a combined force of Athenians and Plataeans.⁵⁹ The victory at Marathon clearly demonstrated that Greek hoplites could defeat Persian forces in pitched battle. The heavily armed Greek infantrymen had a significant advantage over the more lightly armed troops in the Persian army. Geography also gave mainland Greek communities an advantage because the Persians had to transport and supply large numbers of military and non-combat personnel who were not well acquainted with the terrain of mainland Greece.

Roughly ten years later, the Persian king Xerxes launched a full-scale invasion of Greece. At first many Greek cities, including Thebes, agreed to send troops to guard the northern pass of Tempe near Mount Olympus. About ten thousand hoplites set up camp near Tempe but soon realized the pass could not be defended adequately, so it was decided to retreat to the more easily defensible pass at Thermopylae.⁶⁰ Here over six thousand Greek soldiers took up a position to stop the Persians from entering central Greece. With this move the leading Greek states abandoned the Greek communities north of Thermopylae, especially the powerful region of Thessaly. Not surprisingly the Thessalians submitted to the Persians. Herodotus claims, however, that this happened even before the Persian army arrived in Thessaly, going so far as to say the powerful Thessalian family called the Aleuadae were the first Greeks to

offer their submission.⁶¹ Most Greek communities – including Sparta and Athens – had leaders and factions willing to collaborate with the Persians, but pro-Persian sentiment usually did not win out until there were no barriers between the community and the Persian army.⁶² The Greek communities that did not submit generally were the ones that remained out of the reach of Persian forces. The Athenians were able to evacuate their entire population because of their large fleet, and the Peloponnesian cities did not need to submit because their territory was never invaded – throughout the war with Persia the Peloponnesians continually worked on building a wall across the Isthmus of Corinth and constantly advocated for retreating behind the wall.⁶³

Nevertheless, the Peloponnesians did send a substantial force to guard the pass of Thermopylae in 480. Herodotus says there were over three thousand Peloponnesians compared to a little over a thousand Boeotians – the Boeotian contingent consisted of seven hundred Thespians and four hundred Thebans.⁶⁴ According to Herodotus, the soldiers at Thermopylae were only considered an advance force to be followed by reinforcements at the conclusion of religious festivals in the Peloponnesus.⁶⁵ The Thebans had good reason to help defend the pass at Thermopylae – this was the last major barrier for the Persian army before taking all of central Greece. However, Herodotus claims the Thebans were especially suspected of half-hearted support of the Greek cause:

[The Spartan king] Leonidas made an effort to single them out of all the Greeks, because they had been strongly accused of medizing [i.e., collaborating with the Persians]. So he summoned them for the war, wishing to see whether they would send troops with him or whether they would openly repudiate the alliance of the Greeks. Although they were of another mind, they sent troops.⁶⁶

One wonders what being “strongly accused of medizing” amounted to, and why Leonidas would bring along suspect soldiers to help defend the pass at Thermopylae. At the time, the Boeotian contingent had the most to lose if the Greeks failed to hold the pass.

For two days in the late summer of 480 the Greeks successfully defended the pass against Persian attacks.⁶⁷ On the third day, however, the Greeks received word that the Persians had discovered a path around their position and would quickly encircle them. Consequently, all the Greeks – except the Spartans, Thespians, and Thebans – retreated and returned to their home cities. Herodotus provides two different versions of the withdrawal of the Greek soldiers, but favors the view that the Spartan king Leonidas – who was in overall command of the troops – sent them away.⁶⁸ In Herodotus’s opinion, “Leonidas ordered the allies to leave when he perceived that they were not

eager and willing to share in the danger with him.”⁶⁹ Yet Herodotus soon after says, “Although the Thebans were unwilling, they were compelled to stay – Leonidas held them back, treating them as hostages.”⁷⁰ Apparently unaware of the contradiction, Herodotus demonstrates a clear anti-Theban bias in his depiction of Thebans at Thermopylae. It is very likely that there were Thebans at Thermopylae who wanted to halt the Persian advance at all costs and died in the final encounter. This may be the reason why some Thebans were killed even after they surrendered as a group. In the final stages of the battle, Herodotus writes that once the Thebans became separated from the Spartans and Thespians,

They held out their hands and approached the barbarians and said most truthfully that they had medized and had been among the first to give earth and water to the king; they had been compelled to come to Thermopylae and were not guilty of inflicting damage on the king. By saying these things, they survived, since they had the Thessalians as witnesses to their claims. Nevertheless, they were not entirely fortunate. The barbarians seized and killed some of them as they approached, but the majority they branded with the royal marks under Xerxes’s orders, beginning with the general Leontiades.⁷¹

There is no corroborating evidence for Herodotus’s details about the Thebans at Thermopylae, but the city did medize (i.e., collaborate with the Persians) following the Persian victory, which would have influenced later views of the Thebans. The Boeotian writer Plutarch accuses Herodotus of malicious bias in an essay entitled *On the Malice of Herodotus*.⁷² In particular, Plutarch argues that Herodotus shows a strong bias against Boeotians and Corinthians. Other powerful cities such as Argos were also accused of medism, but Herodotus famously says,

The most shameful deeds were not done by the Argives. I am obliged to tell what is said, but I am not at all obliged to believe it – this statement should be applied to my entire work. Since it is also said that the Argives were the ones who summoned the Persian [king] against Greece. After a war against the Spartans had turned out badly for them, they preferred anything to their present distress.⁷³

This passage demonstrates how important bitter rivalries between city-states and later recriminations were in shaping Herodotus’s account of the Persian Wars.

Herodotus’s narrative of the battle of Thermopylae is a prime example of selectivity. As one of the leading powers in Greece, Sparta was fighting to

maintain its freedom from outside interference, but its power was largely dependent on a large slave population. Sparta had state-owned slaves called *helots* who worked the land so that elite Spartan hoplites could serve as full-time soldiers. Surprisingly, however, the Spartans also employed *helots* on campaign and many *helots* died at Thermopylae.⁷⁴ The Greeks later presented the Persian Wars as a struggle between barbarian slavery and Hellenic freedom, but Greek communities were also heavily dependent on slave labor. Thus the barbarian/Hellenic dichotomy was less clear-cut in reality.⁷⁵

Although Herodotus often is overly schematic, he is also capable of showing an appreciation for admirable qualities and great accomplishments of non-Greeks. In his proem, Herodotus says he wrote his account of the Persian Wars “so that human events would not fade away with time, nor would the great and wondrous deeds – some exhibited by the Greeks and others by the barbarians – go without glory. Among other considerations, in particular, there is the cause for the war they waged against one another.”⁷⁶ This has clear Homeric echoes, but it also represents an interest in historical causation. Why did the Greeks and Persians go to war? From the Greek perspective, the cause was Persian hubris and imperialism. From the Persian perspective, the answer was probably Greek deceit and injustice. In Darius I’s famous inscription at Bisitun that details how he established his rule (522–486), the Persian king proclaims that

Auramazda helped me, and the other gods who are: because I was not disloyal, I was not a follower of the Lie, I was not an evildoer – neither I nor my family. I acted according to righteousness. Neither to the powerless nor to the powerful did I do wrong. Him who strove for my house, him I treated well; him who did harm, I punished well.⁷⁷

Although this is not a direct reference to the Persian Wars – there are no extant Persian accounts of the Persian Wars – it is one of the few ancient records from a Persian perspective.⁷⁸ Herodotus provides the fullest and most detailed account of any of our sources, but it should always be kept in mind that he was Greek and writing a generation or more after the conflict. This does not mean that his information is completely unreliable, but he generally betrays a distinct bias against the Persians and any Greeks who sided with them.

After the Persians defeated the Greeks at Thermopylae, they marched through Boeotia on their way to sack Athens. Herodotus says the Persians set fire to the cities of Thespieae and Plataea because the Thebans told them that these cities “refused to medize.”⁷⁹ The Persian army then continued on through Attica and took Athens with very little resistance – the Athenian population

had been evacuated primarily to the island of Salamis before the Persians arrived. Most Peloponnesian leaders advocated for withdrawing to the Isthmus of Corinth, but the Athenian leader Themistocles managed to trick both the Persians and the Greeks into fighting a decisive naval battle in the narrow straits between Salamis and the coastline of Attica. Against all expectations the Greeks defeated the Persian naval forces at the battle of Salamis in late summer of 480. After this defeat, the Persian king Xerxes returned to Persia and left his general Mardonius in charge of the land forces, which spent the winter in Thessaly.

In the following summer Mardonius marched back into central Greece. The Persian general probably had maintained a garrison at Thermopylae in order to have a clear path to take Athens again. Herodotus writes,

When the army marched into Boeotia, the Thebans tried to advise Mardonius to stay. They said that there was no more suitable territory in which to make his camp, and he did not need to go any farther; rather, he should establish a base where he would be able to subjugate all of Greece without a battle. They explained that it would be difficult for the entire world to conquer the Greeks by force of arms as long as they were united as they were before. “But if you do what we recommend,” they said, “you will have all their battle plans. Simply send money to the most powerful men in their cities and you will divide Greece into factions – after that, you will easily subjugate those who oppose you with the help of your partisans.”⁸⁰

Mardonius chose not to take the Thebans’ advice, but he did return to Boeotia after he sacked Athens for a second time. Boeotia had open plains that were ideal for cavalry operations, a particular strength of the Persian army. Mardonius then built a large fortification in Theban territory.

While the Persians were building their fort on the northern shore of the Asopus River, a prominent Theban named Attaginus held a banquet in Thebes to which he invited Mardonius and fifty of the most prominent Persians. According to Herodotus, Attaginus also invited fifty Thebans and had a Persian and a Theban each share a dining couch. Herodotus says during the course of the banquet one of the Persians said the following to his dinner companion:

Do you see the Persian dinner guests, and did you see the army we left encamped near the river? Within a short amount of time, you will see only a few of all of these individuals still alive.... Many Persians know this but we have been bound by necessity to follow. This is the most painful

anguish for mortals – to understand many things but to have no power at all.⁸¹

Interestingly, Herodotus says that his source for this episode was not a Theban but a man named Thersander who was from Orchomenus – a rival city with a history of hostility toward Thebes. Again, there is no evidence to support or reject Herodotus's account. But if Thersander provided Herodotus with other information about the Persian Wars, this may be where Herodotus picked up some of his anti-Theban bias. Like most speeches in Herodotus's *Histories*, the speech of the Persian banquet guest reflects themes that run throughout his work. In this passage Herodotus is concerned with emphasizing the powerless of Persian subjects, who are often portrayed as obsequious and fearful of speaking their minds.

Another important aspect of this banqueting scene is that it reinforces the image of the Thebans as willing and zealous Persian collaborators. The lavish banquet represents eastern decadence and elite distinction. Throughout the Archaic Age, Greek aristocrats had often emulated eastern imagery and luxury through material display and aristocratic practices such as private drinking-parties called *symposia*. However, the Persian Wars accelerated a general mistrust of aristocrats by the general Greek population. A middling ideology had already been present in writers such as Hesiod, but the Persian Wars helped to discredit aristocratic values and claims of superiority. Leaders throughout the Greek world were frequently suspected, often rightly so, of harboring Persian sympathies. The ousted Athenian tyrant Hippias had helped guide Persian forces to Marathon in 490, the exiled Spartan king Demaratus accompanied Xerxes on his invasion of Greece in 480, and Theban aristocrats provided support for the Persians at the battle of Plataea in 479. What is even more significant is that after the Persian Wars, two of the most important Greek leaders sought out relationships with the Persian Empire. Pausanias – the Spartan general who led the Greek forces at the battle of Plataea in 479 – reportedly sought to marry the daughter of the Persian king and gain power and wealth unattainable in Sparta. And Themistocles – the great architect of the Greek naval victory at Salamis in 480 – became a Persian governor after he was ostracized from Athens.⁸² Both Pausanias and Themistocles represent the ambivalence of even the most celebrated Greek leaders toward the Persian Empire. This was also true of whole communities. Throughout the ensuing Classical Age, both Sparta and Athens allied with the Persian Empire at different times to gain advantages over each other.



Figure 3.3 Battlefield of Plataea looking southeast

In the final encounter of the Persian Wars at Plataea, however, Herodotus recounts that the Thebans were the most zealous Persian collaborators. In several instances Theban cavalry and infantry forces provided significant aid to the Persian army. In cavalry skirmishes along the Asopus River, Herodotus says,

The barbarians were testing the Greeks, but neither side crossed over. Nevertheless, Mardonius's cavalry continually pursued and harassed the Greeks, since the Thebans – who very much medized – willingly carried on the war and constantly led the way until the actual battle, at which point the Persians and the Medes took over and were the ones who actually performed valorous actions.⁸³

Although this may be another indication of Herodotus's anti-Theban bias, it points to the fact that Theban cavalry forces were operating in Greece as early as the Persian Wars. Another remark from Herodotus indicates that Theban infantry forces also played a significant role in the conflict at Plataea. Herodotus writes,

Although the other Greek allies of the king deliberately behaved like cowards, the Boeotians fought against the Athenians for a long time. And since the Thebans who medized were fighting with great zeal and not deliberately behaving like cowards, three hundred of their foremost and

best were killed there by the Athenians.⁸⁴

After the victorious Greek forces buried their dead they marched to Thebes and began besieging the city. Initially the Thebans refused to give up their leaders. According to Herodotus, however, on the twentieth day of the siege a Theban leader named Timagenides came forward to address the Theban people as follows:

Men of Thebes. Since the Greeks have resolved not to give up the siege until they destroy Thebes or you hand us over to them, let the land of Boeotia suffer no more on our behalf. On the one hand, if they desire money and are asking for us as a cover, let us give them money from the commonwealth – seeing that we did not medize alone but as members of the commonwealth. On the other hand, if they are besieging our city because they truly want us, we will give ourselves up to answer the charge.⁸⁵

This Herodotean speech clearly implicates all Thebans as medizers but is not supported by subsequent events. As soon as the Thebans surrendered the leaders accused of medizing the Greeks lifted the siege. Herodotus relates that Attaginus – the Theban who had hosted the lavish banquet prior to the battle of Plataea – managed to escape, but

his sons were arrested and brought before Pausanias who acquitted them of any responsibility, saying that the sons were not accomplices to the medism of their father. The Thebans handed over the other men, who thought they would be able to answer the charges and get off by means of bribes. But when Pausanias received them, he suspected that this was their thinking. So he sent the entire allied army away, and leading them to Corinth he put them to death.⁸⁶

In this way Thebes was punished for siding with the Persians. Thebes was not the only city that medized. In fact, only thirty-one Greek cities out of hundreds joined the war against the Persians, and almost all of these were located in the Peloponnesus.⁸⁷ Herodotus only names twenty-five cities that sent troops to Plataea.⁸⁸ And he mentions only five cities that buried their dead at Plataea, and claims the other burial mounds were empty and piled up later by cities embarrassed that they did not participate.⁸⁹ Significantly, there were two Boeotian cities that did not medize – Plataea and Thespieae. As Athenian allies, it is not surprising that the Plataeans refused to join the Persian side. In fact, Thucydides has Theban speakers say as much during the Peloponnesian War. They claim that the only reason the Plataeans did not join the Persian

side was because the Athenians did not, and that after the Persian Wars the Plataeans were guilty of atticism – that is, of collaborating with the Athenians. The Thebans also go on to say that their city was not guilty of medism during the Persian Wars because their leaders deprived the city of its freedom and ancestral constitution.⁹⁰ The conflict became a defining moment for Greek culture, but in the ensuing Classical Age it became clear that the Athenians could be just as imperialistic as the Persian Empire.

Notes

- 1 For possible Boeotian involvement in overseas colonies, see Symeonoglou 1985, 97–98. For a recent discussion of Greek colonization, see Malkin 2016.
- 2 Arist. *Pol.* 1274b 1–5. Cf. 1265b 12–16.
- 3 For Hesiod’s *Askra*, see Edwards 2004.
- 4 For an introduction to Hesiod, see Most 2006–2007, 1.xi–lxxv.
- 5 Hes. *Op.* 161–166.
- 6 Symeonoglou 1985, 84.
- 7 Symeonoglou 1985, 91.
- 8 Cf. Symeonoglou 1985, 85, 89.
- 9 See Figures 1.6 and 1.7. For a brief overview and earlier bibliography on the Mycenaean wall around the Cadmea, see Aravantinos 2015, 24–26.
- 10 Cf. Symeonoglou 1985, 62–63.
- 11 Symeonoglou 1985, 118. Cf. Bennet 2007, 187; 2013, 245. For a review of the scholarship on the demography of ancient Greece, see Hin 2015.
- 12 Symeonoglou 1985, 118.
- 13 Hdt. 9.15.
- 14 Snodgrass 1965, 112.
- 15 See Comstock and Vermeule 1971, no. 15.
- 16 For the various controversies surrounding hoplite warfare, see Kagan and Viggiano 2013.
- 17 Cf. van Wees 2004, 153–165, 249–252.
- 18 Hdt. 2.152.4–5. Cf. Meiggs and Lewis 1988, no. 7; Fornara 1983, no. 24. It should be noted that Herodotus came from the Carian city of Halicarnassus. See Map 1 Regions and cities.
- 19 Hdt. 1.171.4. Cf. Snodgrass 1964.
- 20 Hanson [1989] 2009, 65–71.
- 21 For discussion of this sanctuary, see Schachter 1981–1994, 152–73; 2016, 151–167. It was located over twenty-five kilometers from Thebes near the Boeotian city of Acraephia. See Map 4 Boeotian districts, cities, and

towns.

- 22 Hdt. 8.135.2–3.
- 23 Thuc. 1.8.1. Cf. Hornblower 1991–2008, 1.29–30. For the controversial issue of Egyptian and Phoenician colonization of the Aegean, see Bernal 1987–2006; Lefkowitz and Rogers 1996; Berlinerblau 1999; Bernal 2001; Orrells et al. 2011; van Binsbergen 2011. For an introduction to some of the main arguments in the debate, see Bernal 1996 and Lefkowitz 1996.
- 24 E.g., the Dendra panoply and Theban armor. See Figures 2.3 and 2.4. The fundamental difference between heavily armed Mycenaean warriors and Archaic hoplites was that the latter purchased their own equipment and were not directly tied to a centralized palace.
- 25 Scholars have estimated that a full panoply of hoplite equipment cost about three months' wages for a moderately skilled worker: Connor 1988, 10–11 n. 30; Hanson 1995, 295–297; van Wees 2004, 52.
- 26 Arist. *Pol.* 1297b 22–24. Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1289b 27–32.
- 27 Arist. *Pol.* 1295a 25–1296a 21.
- 28 For a reassessment of ancient tyranny, see Lewis 2006, 1–14.
- 29 Andrewes 1956.
- 30 Salmon 1977.
- 31 Hdt. 1.61.4, 1.64.1.
- 32 Cf. *Ath. Pol.* 16.
- 33 Hdt. 5.67–68.
- 34 Hdt. 1.61.3. For sixth-century dedications by Athenians at a Boeotian sanctuary, which included Hipparchus the son of Pisistratus, see Schachter 2016, 151–167.
- 35 Fornara 1983, no. 7.
- 36 Pouysségur 2016.
- 37 Jacobsen 1943; 1959; Fleming 2004; Vlassopoulos 2007, 101–122; Von Dassow 2011. Cf. Robinson 1997, 13–33; Finley 1964; 1981; Raaflaub 2004; 2015, 7–9.
- 38 Paus. 9.38.2. There was also the nearby fortification at Gla, which may have been controlled by Orchomenus and was part of an impressive program that drained Lake Copais in the Late Bronze Age.
- 39 Diod. 4.10.3.
- 40 Diod. 4.10.4.
- 41 Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.11.
- 42 For references see Buck 1979, 104 n. 85.
- 43 For the various dates proposed by modern scholars, see Mackil 2013, 24 n. 14.
- 44 For citations of the modern discussions of the early Boeotian coinage, see Beck 2014, 34 n. 36.

- 45 Beck 2014, 34–35.
- 46 Thuc. 3.68.4.
- 47 Hdt. 6.108.2–3.
- 48 Hdt. 6.108.5–6. See Map 4 Boeotian districts, cities, and towns.
- 49 Hdt. 1.61.3.
- 50 Thuc. 6.53.3. Cf. Thuc. 1.20.2.
- 51 Schachter 2016, 165. The growth in power of Athens and Thebes may have alarmed the Spartans who were the strongest power in sixth-century Greece. Sparta directly controlled two-fifths of the Peloponnesus and was the leading city of the Peloponnesian League.
- 52 Hdt. 5.74–75. The campaign eventually dissolved when the Corinthians withdrew from the invasion of Attica and the two Spartan kings quarreled in the field over whether or not to continue the military action.
- 53 Hdt. 5.77; Meiggs and Lewis 1988 no. 15; Aravantinos 2006.
- 54 Beck 2014, 27.
- 55 For the nature of the Boeotian federation in the late sixth century and earlier bibliography, see Beck and Ganter 2015, 137–138.
- 56 Hdt. 5.79.1–2.
- 57 Hdt. 5.80–81.
- 58 Hdt. 5–6; Burn 1962, 193–217; Briant 2002, 146–156; Cawkwell 2005, 61–86; Kuhrt [2007] 2010, 211–231.
- 59 Hdt. 6.108–115; Krentz 2010.
- 60 Hdt. 7.172–173.
- 61 Hdt. 7.6.2, 7.130.3, 7.172.1. Cf. Hdt. 7.233.1 where Herodotus has Thebans say they were “among the first to give earth and water to the king.” Providing earth and water to the Persian king was a symbolic act of submission; although it figures prominently in Herodotus’s *Histories*, the precise meaning of this action is not clearly understood. For recent scholarship, see Kuhrt [2007] 2010, 199 n. 6.
- 62 E.g., Hdt. 6.70, 6.109.5, 6.115, 6.123–124, 7.3, 7.101, 7.234–235, 8.109–110.
- 63 Hdt. 7.207, 8.40.2, 8.49.2, 8.71–72, 8.74.1.
- 64 Hdt. 7.202. For the number of Greek soldiers at the later battle of Plataea, see Hdt. 9.28–30, 9.67.
- 65 Hdt. 7.206.
- 66 Hdt. 7.205.3.
- 67 Hdt. 7.210–212.
- 68 Hdt. 7.219.2–7.220.1.
- 69 Hdt. 7.220.2.
- 70 Hdt. 7.222.
- 71 Hdt. 7.233.1–2. It seems that slaves in the Persian Empire were tattooed or branded on their wrists – alternatively their cheeks – with their owner’s

name: Stolper 1998; Kuhrt [2007] 2010, 704–705.

72 Plut. *Mor.* 854–873.

73 Hdt. 7.152.3.

74 Hdt. 8.25.1. Cf. Hdt. 7.229.1, 9.29.1, 9.85.2.

75 For a critique of this traditional dichotomy, see in particular Vlassopoulos 2007, 101–122.

76 Hdt. proem.

77 Translation: Kuhrt [2007] 2010, 148–149.

78 The Bisitun inscription was probably done early in the reign of Darius I: Kuhrt [2007] 2010, 151 n. 1.

79 Hdt. 8.50.2.

80 Hdt. 9.2. Cf. Hdt. 9.41; Plut. *Arist.* 13.

81 Hdt. 9.16.3–5. For a similar sentiment, see Soph. *OT* 316; *Ant.* 1347; *Aj.* 1418.

82 Thuc. 1.95.5, 1.128–138.

83 Hdt. 9.40. Cf. Hdt. 9.68, 9.69.2.

84 Hdt. 9.67.

85 Hdt. 9.87.1–2. Cf. Thuc. 3.62; Plut. *Arist.* 18; Paus. 9.6.2.

86 Hdt. 9.88.

87 Fornara 1983, no. 59; Meiggs and Lewis 1988, no. 27.

88 Hdt. 9.28–30.

89 Hdt. 9.85.

90 Thuc. 3.62.

4 Classical Thebes (479–404 BCE)

There is very little information about Thebes for a couple of decades following the Persian Wars. Because the Thebans had sided with the Persians at the battle of Plataea, they probably lost their ability to persuade any of the Boeotian communities to follow their lead in war or politics. At the same time, the Athenians were laying the foundation of an Aegean empire known as the Delian League, which originally was a Greek alliance led by Athens to ensure the Persians would not be able to invade Greece again. Athens eventually used its powerful navy to subjugate its allies, which provoked two major wars in fifth-century Greece. During the first major conflict, traditionally known as the First Peloponnesian War (460–446), the Athenians and their allies in the Delian League waged war against Sparta and its Peloponnesian League; they also gained control of Boeotia for roughly a decade. In addition, Athens was strong enough to undertake military campaigns against the Persian Empire in Cyprus and Egypt. After a series of major setbacks, including a successful Boeotian revolt, the Athenians were forced to accept a peace treaty. However, hostilities broke out again between Athens and Sparta and their respective allies and led to a much more destructive conflict known simply as the Peloponnesian War (431–404). By this time the Thebans had regained their leading position in Boeotia and played a pivotal role in helping Sparta ultimately defeat Athens in the Peloponnesian War.

The first apparent attempt by the Thebans to regain their leadership of Boeotia occurred in 470 and demonstrates how religion could be used to try to revive a city's lost prestige. In this year, Herodotus says that the Thebans were ordered by a prophecy to recover a gilded statue of Apollo that had been stolen from the Boeotian sanctuary of Apollo at Delium during the Persian Wars.¹ The Persian general Datis, who had been defeated at Marathon in 490, after receiving a vision in his sleep found the statue on one of his Phoenician ships as he sailed home. He then sailed to the island of Delos and deposited the statue in the sanctuary of Apollo there, ordering the Delians to return the statue to Delium in Boeotia: because of his recent defeat at Marathon he

probably could not risk returning to mainland Greece, and the island of Delos was the purported birthplace of Apollo. Nevertheless, the Delians did not carry out his request. So, twenty years later in 470, the Thebans undertook the religious mission to Delos and returned the gilded statue of Apollo to Delium.

It is possible that in the 470s Thebes was on friendly terms with the Athenians, who probably would have had to grant Theban delegates access to the island of Delos, the center of Athens's newly formed Delian League. Plutarch also tells us that sometime after the Persian Wars the Athenian statesman Themistocles successfully lobbied not to exclude the Thessalians, Argives, and the Thebans from membership of the Amphictyonic League, the Panhellenic association that controlled the affairs of the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi. The Spartans had proposed to exclude all those states that had not fought with them against the Persians, but Themistocles was concerned that the Spartans would gain the majority of the votes in the association if these major states were excluded.² Maintaining a stable balance of power in Greece was always a primary concern of Greek statesmen, but the growing antagonism between Sparta and Athens eventually led to the First Peloponnesian War.

Athenian domination of Boeotia (457–446)

During this war, Athens used its massive fleet to control the seas and launch attacks on the territory of Sparta and its allies. However, the Spartans were not idle. In 457 they conducted a military campaign into central Greece; but when they wanted to return home, the Spartans encountered difficulties because Athens had control of the main land and sea routes. Thucydides says, "They decided to wait in Boeotia to see what was the safest way for them to pass through. In addition, some Athenians were making secret overtures to them in the hopes of putting an end to democracy and the building of the Long Walls."³ Throughout the fifth and fourth centuries, pro-Spartan factions in many Greek cities, including Athens, sought Spartan aid to help settle affairs in their favor, which often meant establishing oligarchic institutions similar to those in Sparta. Diodorus adds that the Thebans also made a special appeal to the Spartans:

The Thebans had been humbled because of their alliance with Xerxes and sought a way to recover their ancestral power and reputation. Since all the Boeotians despised them and no longer paid attention to them, the Thebans asked the Spartans to help their city secure the hegemony over all Boeotia. In return for this favor, they offered to wage war against the Athenians by themselves, so that it would no longer be necessary for the Spartans to lead

an army out of the Peloponnesus. The Spartans judged their proposal to be advantageous and believed that if Thebes increased in power, it would be something of a rival to Athens. Since they had a large army ready near Tanagra at the time, they increased the wall of Thebes and compelled the cities of Boeotia to obey the Thebans.⁴

Although Diodorus is a late source, he frequently provides valuable supplementary material. One of his main sources was the fourth-century historian Ephorus, whose lost work was quoted extensively in antiquity and praised for its overall accuracy – the main exception being military descriptions, which are also a problem in Diodorus's work.⁵ Diodorus has a tendency to provide two different accounts of the same battle, which contributes to frequent mistakes in chronology. Nevertheless, when these shortcomings are put into their proper perspective Diodorus is a valuable source for the Classical Age.

Battles of Tanagra and Oenophyta (457)

As both Thucydides and Diodorus make clear, the Spartan presence in central Greece in 457 caused considerable concern in Athens. So much so that the Athenians quickly mobilized their army and marched into Boeotia. A major battle took place near Tanagra, but the Spartans and their allies – which undoubtedly included a substantial number of Boeotians – soundly defeated the Athenians. After this, the Spartans returned to the Peloponnesus and probably expected pro-Spartan factions in Boeotia to keep the region allied to Sparta. However, the Athenians mustered another military force sixty-two days later and invaded Boeotia again. This time the Athenians won a stunning victory at Oenophyta.⁶ Diodorus says the Athenian victory at Oenophyta was unsurpassed even by Marathon and Plataea because these battles were fought against barbarians and with the help of allies, whereas at Oenophyta “the Athenians dared to fight alone and were victorious, battling against the best of the Greeks.” He then adds, “The Boeotians are considered to be unsurpassed by others in their endurance of dangers and military conflicts.”⁷ There are some confusions and doublets in Diodorus's account of the battles of Tanagra and Oenophyta.⁸ But there is general agreement between Thucydides and Diodorus about the results of these two engagements. Most important, the victory at Oenophyta allowed the Athenians to control Boeotia for a decade.⁹

Nevertheless, there is uncertainty concerning the nature of Athenian control in Boeotia following the battle of Oenophyta. Both Thucydides and Diodorus say the Athenians tore down the walls of Tanagra after the battle.¹⁰ Because the Athenians directed their hostility against the city of Tanagra, it is possible

that Tanagra was taking the lead in Boeotian affairs at the time. Apparently, Tanagra was the only Boeotian city to mint coins with the federal insignia – the so-called Boeotian shield – from 479 to 457.¹¹ Diodorus adds that the Athenian leader Myronides “attacked all of Boeotia, dividing it up and destroying it.”¹² This statement may indicate that the Athenians disbanded an early Boeotian federation, or at the very least a Boeotian military alliance.

Most likely the Athenians controlled the Boeotian cities through pro-Athenian factions that may have established democratic governments.¹³ However, there is a statement by the fifth-century author known as the Old Oligarch that may indicate the Athenians were partly responsible for the oppression of the people in Boeotia.¹⁴ Leaders of pro-Athenian factions may have used the military support of Athens to stamp out any opposition to their rule. According to Aristotle, democracy could be just as oppressive as oligarchy or tyranny if leaders were not constrained by the laws.¹⁵ Throughout the Classical Age, both Athens and Sparta engaged in power politics more often than they adhered to consistent ideological and ethical standards.

For a time after Oenophyta a pro-Athenian democratic faction probably controlled Thebes as well. However, according to Aristotle the democracy at Thebes was overthrown at some point because of bad government.¹⁶ In two separate statements, Aristotle makes reference to an oligarchic law passed in Thebes that prohibited any person from holding office who had not abstained from activity in the agora or the work of a craftsman for ten years.¹⁷ These occupations were often associated with the lower classes, and therefore may indicate that the Thebans did experiment with democracy before returning to oligarchy. Nevertheless, Aristotle does not provide a historical context for this Theban legislation. It is equally possible that ten years was a common span of time in Greek legislation.¹⁸

Whether or not pro-Athenian democrats maintained control in Thebes for the entire period of Athenian domination of Boeotia, there is evidence that the Boeotian cities of Orchomenus and Acraephia paid tribute to Athens in the 450s.¹⁹ This is somewhat surprising because Orchomenus seems to have played a leading role in the liberation of Boeotia in 446.

Coronea (446)

In this year, the Athenians received word that anti-Athenian exiles had taken control of cities in northwest Boeotia. So the Athenians sent out a military force that included one thousand Athenians and an unspecified number of allied soldiers under the command of the Athenian general Tolmides. Thucydides says,

They captured Chaeronea and enslaved the population; and after they established a garrison, they departed. But as they were marching, Boeotian exiles from Orchomenus, Locrians, Euboean exiles, and many supporters who were of the same opinion attacked at Coronea. They defeated the Athenians in battle, killing some and taking others alive. The Athenians evacuated all of Boeotia, after making a treaty for the recovery of their men. The Boeotian exiles returned and all the others were autonomous again.²⁰

This ambush and defeat of Athenian forces at Coronea spurred other revolts in the Athenian Empire. Eventually the Athenians were forced to sign the Thirty Years' Peace that ended the First Peloponnesian War.

Orchomenus seems to have taken the lead in rallying Boeotia against the Athenians.²¹ Nevertheless, during the later Peloponnesian War (431–404), Thucydides has Theban speakers say, “Did we not fight and conquer the Athenians at Coronea and liberate Boeotia? And do we not now eagerly join in liberating others, providing horses and more armament than any other ally?”²² Possibly this Thucydidean speech reflects later propaganda on the part of Theban representatives to include Thebans among those who fought at Coronea. Or possibly some Theban exiles did participate in the battle of Coronea, but since the action was not in Theban territory Orchomenians took the lead in the conflict. Thebes was only one of several strong cities in Boeotia – Tanagra, Orchomenus, Thespieae, and Plataea were all fairly large cities and often fiercely opposed Theban leadership.

Circuit wall of Greater Thebes

After the victory at Coronea, the Boeotians created a federation that over time made them one of the strongest powers in Greece. Although very little is known about the internal history of Boeotia until the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, Thebes may have strengthened its position in Boeotia by building, or expanding, an outer circuit wall around the city. The Cadmea had been fortified with a wall probably since the eighth century, but an extensive outer wall around Greater Thebes very likely was not constructed until sometime in the Classical Age. Sarantis Symeonoglou says, “The archaeological evidence for dating is confined to the method of construction, which is characterized by regularity (in the size of the stone blocks) and precision of execution, indicative of Classical rather than Archaic work.”²³

The archaeological evidence does not allow for more precise dating, so we have to turn to the textual evidence. As stated above, Diodorus says that in 457 while the Spartans had an army in Boeotia they “increased the wall of

Thebes.”²⁴ Around this same time Thucydides says the Athenians built Long Walls at Megara as well as their own Long Walls.²⁵ The Spartans may have been reacting to Athens’s aggressive actions throughout the Greek world, and wanted to have Thebes as a stronghold in central Greece. If Thebes was well fortified before the battle of Oenophyta, it makes sense that Diodorus says the Athenians gained control of all of Boeotia except Thebes.²⁶ Yet, Thucydides does not make any mention of the construction of an outer circuit wall around Thebes at this time or any subsequent period. The earliest source to imply that there was a wall around Greater Thebes is the Oxyrhynchus historian who says that when war broke out between Athens and Sparta Boeotians living in unwallled towns moved to Thebes and doubled its size.²⁷ Thus, according to the Oxyrhynchus historian, Thebes must have had the outer circuit wall by the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.

Peloponnesian War (431–404)

Although Athens’s Delian League and Sparta’s Peloponnesian League were the leading alliance systems in fifth-century Greece, the Boeotian federation played a central role in the opening stages of the Peloponnesian War.²⁸ The very first military action of the war involved a Theban military contingent secretly entering Plataea at night to compel the city to join the Boeotian federation. The Theban soldiers were able to gain access into Plataea because of civil discord. Members of a pro-Theban faction – led by a man named Naucleides – had opened the gates to the Thebans because they wanted to get power for themselves by executing their opponents and handing the city over to the Theban soldiers. Thucydides writes that after the Thebans

grounded their arms in the agora, however, they were not persuaded by those who brought them in to engage in action immediately and go to the houses of their enemies. Instead, they decided to use announcements suitable for coming to an agreement to make the city friendlier – their herald announced that anyone who wanted to join the alliance of all Boeotians according to the ancestral constitution should ground their arms beside them. In this way, they thought the city would readily join them.²⁹

This passage demonstrates that there were pro- and anti-Theban factions in Boeotian cities. This is not at all surprising considering Plataea’s proximity to Thebes and long history of hostility toward Thebes. Significantly, two federal magistrates called *boeotarchs* (“leaders of Boeotia”) commanded the Theban troops.³⁰ These were the highest officials in the Boeotian federation, and Thucydides tells us elsewhere that there were eleven.³¹ Thucydides also says

there were four federal councils that had supreme power in Boeotia, but the boeotarchs had significant leeway to carry out military actions and make diplomatic arrangements as they saw fit.³²



Figure 4.1 Plataea at the base of Mount Cithaeron looking south

Continuing his account of the Theban armed entry into Plataea, Thucydides writes,

When the Plataeans realized that the Thebans were inside and the city was unexpectedly occupied, they thought more had entered because they were frightened and they were not able to see at night. As a result, they came to an agreement, accepting the terms and remaining quiet – especially since the Thebans did not use violence against anyone. During the negotiations, however, they observed that there were not many Thebans and believed that if they attacked they could easily overpower them. The majority of the Plataeans did not want to abandon the Athenian alliance.³³

The Plataeans then proceeded to attack with the help of women and slaves who threw stones and roof tiles at the Theban soldiers.³⁴ After intense street fighting and the loss of many soldiers, the Thebans were forced to surrender. The Plataeans took the survivors captive – a total of one hundred and eighty – and demanded that the Theban army, which had recently arrived, evacuate Plataean territory. After the Theban army withdrew, the Plataeans brought in everything of value from the countryside and executed their Theban

prisoners.³⁵ The Athenians marched into Plataean territory, brought in provisions, evacuated non-combatants, and installed a garrison. Thucydides then declares:

After the action at Plataea occurred and the treaty [that had ended the First Peloponnesian War] had clearly been broken, the Athenians prepared for war, as did the Spartans and their allies. They both intended to send envoys to the Persian king and to other barbarians, from whom each hoped to receive some assistance; and they intended to make allies of all the cities that were not under their control.³⁶

In the first two years of the war, Sparta led invasions into Attica to provoke a decisive land battle with Athens. Traditionally, the ravaging of a city's countryside would draw out its armed forces to engage in hoplite combat. However, Athens chose to remain behind its extensive fortifications, which included the Long Walls that connected the city directly to its main port the Piraeus and its powerful navy. In the third year of the war, after failing to draw the Athenians out from behind their walls the previous two years, the Spartans invaded Plataean territory. This may have been in part because an unknown disease had appeared in Athens the previous year.³⁷

Thebes was probably another big reason for Sparta's decision to march on Plataea. As a powerful ally that contributed the largest force of Sparta's allies and was not far from the border of Attica, Thebes probably exerted considerable influence on Sparta.³⁸ If the allies were able to take Plataea and expel the Athenian garrison, they would have control of a key strategic point in the increasingly brutal and destructive Peloponnesian War.

Once the Spartans demonstrated their intention to ravage Plataea's land, the Plataeans sent envoys to the Spartans. They appealed to Plataean heroism during the Persian Wars and the purported oath of Plataea, which declared that the Plataeans were to be autonomous and free from invasion and enslavement.³⁹ The Spartan king Archidamus – who was leading the invasion force – countered by saying,

Be autonomous and join in liberating others who shared in the dangers at that time and swore the oaths together with you but are now ruled by the Athenians. This armament and war of freedom has been carried out on their behalf as well as others. You especially should share in the effort and stand by your oaths. If not, just as we have already admonished you before, remain inactive and tend to your own affairs. Do not join either of the two sides, receive both as friends and neither as allies for war.⁴⁰

This amounted to an ultimatum that the Plataeans expel the Athenian garrison

and renounce their long-standing alliance with Athens. The Plataeans then sent envoys to Athens to inform the Athenians of their desperate plight. The Athenians said they had never abandoned the Plataeans since becoming their allies and would continue do everything in their power to help the Plataeans. Therefore, they called on the Plataeans to maintain the oaths they swore to the Athenians and keep the alliance intact.⁴¹ After the envoys returned to Plataea and delivered this message, the Plataeans strengthened their resolve and defied the Spartans.

The Spartans then began the long process of besieging the city of Plataea, which eventually led to completely surrounding it with a double wall so that nothing – personnel or otherwise – would be able to come in or out of Plataea. After the wall was finished near the end of the campaigning season, the various contingents of the invasion force returned home; sufficient numbers of troops, however, stayed to guard the wall. Peloponnesian soldiers manned half the wall, with Boeotian troops defending the other half. According to Thucydides, there remained in the city four hundred Plataean citizens, one hundred and ten women, and eighty Athenians.⁴²

The siege of Plataea lasted several years. In the winter of the second year, half of those besieged in the city made a daring escape.⁴³ Eventually, two hundred and twelve Plataeans reached Athens and were granted citizenship.⁴⁴ There may have been an earlier promise of Athenian citizenship back in the late sixth century when the Plataeans first had become allies of Athens. But it was probably not until the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War that Plataeans immigrated to Athens in large numbers. For the Greeks, citizenship was fundamentally tied to place. As a result, the Plataeans may never have been considered full Athenian citizens.⁴⁵

Destruction of Plataea (427)

The siege of Plataea finally ended in the summer of 427. Without provisions and the manpower to fend off repeated attacks on the city wall, the Plataeans surrendered to the Spartans. According to Thucydides, the Spartan commander had perceived the Plataeans' weakness and wanted them to surrender voluntarily, in this way Sparta would not have to return Plataea to the Athenians if a peace agreement was later reached.⁴⁶ Therefore, the Spartan commander sent a herald to the Plataeans to ask them to surrender voluntarily and promised that no one would be punished illegally.⁴⁷ The Plataeans were brought before five judges sent from Sparta and were asked if they had done anything good for Sparta and its allies in the present war. Two Plataean representatives then asked leave to answer the Spartans' laconic question. The first thing they said was they suspected the Spartans had already decided the

Plataeans were guilty to please the Thebans.⁴⁸ Then they reminded the Spartan judges that the Spartans were the ones to blame for their alliance with Athens in the first place because “after we asked for your alliance at the time the Thebans were committing violence against us, you rejected us and told us to turn to the Athenians who were near, since you lived far away.”⁴⁹ From the Plataeans’ perspective, the Spartans were really to blame for their city’s alliance with Athens.

Throughout their speech the Plataeans frequently referred to their service during the Persian Wars. At one point, they explicitly contrasted their behavior with that of the Thebans, saying, “When the barbarian was threatening all with slavery, they were on his side.”⁵⁰ The Plataeans also defended their recent actions, which included the execution of their Theban prisoners. They said that the Thebans had treacherously entered their city not only during a time of peace but also during a sacred time of the month, and that it was a universal law to resist an invader. Then they said that the Spartans were judging them not based on notions of justice but on what benefited them, which was to please the Thebans.⁵¹ Once the Plataeans reluctantly concluded their speech, Thucydides says the Thebans asked to speak.

The Thebans began their speech by saying that they would not have spoken if the Plataeans had not made accusations against them.⁵² The Thebans then proceeded to provide a highly compressed account of Boeotian history. They claimed that they settled Plataea after they drove out the mixed population from the rest of Boeotia, and they reached an agreement with the Plataeans who were to follow Theban leadership. After that, however, the Plataeans betrayed their ancestral connections and made an alliance with the Athenians, after which Thebes used coercion to bring them back into a Boeotian alliance.⁵³ Then the Thebans moved on to accuse the Plataeans of siding with the new imperial power in Greece, namely Athens. The Thebans directly equated Plataea becoming a subordinate ally of Athens – atticism – to joining the Persian side during the Persian Wars.⁵⁴

However, according to the Thebans there was a world of difference between the actions of Thebes and Plataea. According to Thucydides, the Thebans declared that during the Persian Wars their city did not have an oligarchy with equal rights or a democracy but a small group of leaders who ruled like tyrants and kept the people down by force and used the presence of the Persians to strengthen their hold on power.⁵⁵ The implication is that Plataea did have a consensual form of government when it decided to become an ally of Athens. The Thebans then emphasized that the Plataeans went beyond merely protecting themselves against Theban attacks – they joined Athens in enslaving others.⁵⁶

At the end of their speech, the Thebans moved on to a discussion of the Theban armed entry into Plataea – the action that actually sparked the Peloponnesian War. Again, the Thebans put the blame on the Plataeans. They said that Plataean oligarchs, who had more at stake because of their wealth and nobility, called them in because they wanted to end the foreign alliance with Athens and restore the Plataeans to their common Boeotian heritage.⁵⁷ The Thebans asserted that the Plataean oligarchs simply “wanted the lower classes not to become worse and the upper classes to have their due honor by moderating opinion.”⁵⁸ This passage is a classic expression of oligarchic thinking in fifth-century Greece. Those who had wealth and claimed noble bloodlines were considered superior in intellect and character, and thus were considered best able to make political decisions for the whole community. Most oligarchic constitutions had property qualifications in place in order to exclude the lower classes from holding office and to limit their role in political affairs.

However, by the time of the Peloponnesian War, democracy was just as powerful an ideology as oligarchy. This was primarily because of the overwhelming success of the Athenian Empire, which was governed by a direct democracy. The Athenian people as a whole were considered the sovereign political body, not just the wealthy few. In the famous Funeral Oration, Thucydides says Pericles declared about the Athenian constitution, “in name it is called a democracy because it is managed not for the few but for the many.” The laws provided equal justice for all and merit and ability were more important than class considerations.⁵⁹ In many respects, the Athenian democracy was revolutionary and ran counter to traditional notions of social and political hierarchies. The lower classes in Athens were given a much more substantial voice than in other cities because there were frequent assembly meetings that every adult male citizen could attend. In addition, members of Athens’s Council of Five Hundred – which prepared the agenda for the assembly – were annually selected by lot. As a result, any adult male Athenian could potentially serve as a councilor at some point in his lifetime. Athenian law courts were also open to all adult male citizens. In fact, Pericles established jury pay in the 450s, so that even poor Athenians could be jurors. Thus, the hallmarks and foundations of the Athenian democracy were frequent assembly meetings and jury courts composed of the broad citizen body. Equally important was the development of the Athenian navy, which was primarily manned by the lower classes of Athens.⁶⁰ Radical democracy in Athens provided greater freedoms and opportunities for the citizen population, but it also helped create a dynamic superpower that threatened the autonomy of all Greek states.

Athens’s relationship with Plataea probably extended beyond military

support to include influence on political institutions. Near the end of the Thebans' speech, there is the implication that Plataea was a democracy at the time.⁶¹ This would have created a further point of contention between Plataea and Thebes since Thebes was an oligarchy at the time.⁶² Nevertheless, expediency was just as important a factor. After the Spartan judges finished listening to the speeches they brought the Plataeans in and asked them whether they had helped the Spartans in the current war. When the Plataeans replied that they had not, they were taken out and executed. More than two hundred Plataeans were killed and twenty-five Athenians. And the women were sold into slavery.⁶³ Thucydides adds that the Spartans adopted their hostile stance toward the Plataeans mainly to please the Thebans who were considered beneficial allies in the war.⁶⁴

After the slaughter of the Plataean and Athenian prisoners, the Thebans at first gave the city to pro-Theban Plataeans and political exiles from Megara; but then they razed the city, possibly to avoid any foreign power establishing a fortified position in Boeotia again. Thucydides also says the Thebans built an inn connected to the nearby sanctuary of Hera, dedicated sacred couches to her made from the brass and iron taken from the Plataean walls they destroyed, and built a stone chapel in Hera's honor. Lastly, they confiscated the land of Plataea and granted ten-year leases to Thebans.⁶⁵ The destruction of Plataea could be seen as a heinous act but events would show that the Athenians continued to threaten Boeotian autonomy.⁶⁶

Battle of Delium (424)

Three years after the destruction of Plataea, the Thebans again had to fend off Athenian attempts to interfere in Boeotian affairs. Thucydides tells us that some Boeotians led by a Theban exile named Ptoeodorus appealed to Athenian leaders "to change their government into a democracy."⁶⁷ Factional strife again played a central role in instigating hostilities in Boeotia. The strength and vitality of the Athenian Empire with its dominant navy and democratic ideology may have seemed like a better alternative to the status quo, which in oligarchic Thebes probably excluded many capable individuals.

The planned invasion of Boeotia involved a three-prong strategy – pro-Athenian factions were to take control of a southern seaport in Thesopian territory, the city of Chaeronea in northwest Boeotia, and the sanctuary of Apollo at Delium on the eastern seaboard.⁶⁸ Thucydides explains that those who had conceived of the plan thought that even if a democratic revolution did not sweep through Boeotia immediately, the fortified Athenian positions would serve as rallying points to eventually bring all of Boeotia over to Athens.⁶⁹ As it turned out, the coordinated attack fell apart and the Athenians

only managed to secure and fortify the sanctuary of Apollo at Delium. Despite it being a sacred precinct, the Athenians built a trench and wall with wooden towers around the sanctuary using all available material.⁷⁰ Just as the Thebans had recently attacked and confiscated the consecrated ground of Plataea, the Athenians were now appropriating a sacred precinct in Boeotia.

After the Athenians fortified Delium, the bulk of the army set off to return to Attica. By the time the Boeotians mustered their regional army, the Athenian army was already back in Attica, having just crossed over the border. Nevertheless, the overall commander of the Boeotian army – a Theban boeotarch named Pagondas – gave an impassioned speech to convince the Boeotians to engage the Athenians in pitched battle.⁷¹ Thucydides has Pagondas say it did not matter that the Athenian army was no longer in Boeotia: “It is your ancestral custom to defend yourselves against the invasion of a foreign army whether in your homeland or the land of your neighbors. Besides, when it is the Athenians who live on your border, it is extremely important.”⁷² Theban medism during the Persian Wars certainly contradicts this statement, but other Thucydidean speeches routinely demonstrate the mendacious tendencies of speakers. In the pre-battle harangue, Pagondas had to draw a stark contrast between the Boeotians and the Athenians. Thus, he ends his speech in highly rhetorical terms:

We must advance together and show them that they must go and get what they want from those who do not defend themselves. But for those who are high-minded and always fight for the freedom of their land and never unjustly enslave the land of others, they will not leave without a challenge.⁷³

These grand proclamations again ring hollow when juxtaposed with the most recent actions of the Boeotians when they destroyed the city of Plataea and enslaved the surviving population. Yet, Boeotians could make the argument that their actions were continually guided by the desire to maintain their autonomy from outside interference. Since the late sixth century, the Athenians had consistently proven their willingness to intervene directly in Boeotian affairs. During the Persian Wars, many Boeotians may have seen the Persians as welcomed allies in their constant struggle against the Athenians. At least in theory, the battle of Plataea in 479, the battle of Coronea in 446, the destruction of Plataea in 427, and now the battle of Delium in 424 were all “for the freedom of their land.”

The battle of Delium provides a good example of key aspects of hoplite warfare, though with some unique characteristics. The Boeotians and Athenians were evenly matched – each side had seven thousand hoplites

arrayed eight rows deep with cavalry and light-armed troops stationed on the wings. The primary aim of the compact formation of heavily armed hoplites in the phalanx was to smash through the opposing lines while maintaining order. At Delium this was aided by the apparent novelty of the Theban hoplites forming their units into rows twenty-five deep.⁷⁴ In the ensuing battle, in typical Greek fashion the right side of each army was victorious against the left side – the strongest contingents in Greek armies were usually placed on the right side. The Athenian hoplites on the right side were so successful that they ended up encircling the enemy and mistakenly killing some of their own soldiers. According to Thucydides, the Thebans on their respective right side “defeated the Athenians, shoving them back gradually at first and then they pursued.”⁷⁵ Initially the cavalry and light-armed units on both sides did not engage with the enemy because of limited space on the battlefield. These units typically engaged in pre-battle skirmishes; and once the heavily armed infantry units engaged, these auxiliary units protected the vulnerable flanks of the hoplite phalanx. At Delium, however, when the Theban general Pagondas saw the left side of his Boeotian army being defeated by the Athenians he sent two cavalry squadrons to provide assistance. Thucydides says, “When they suddenly appeared, the victorious wing of the Athenians thought it was another army coming against them and panicked. Now for this reason and the Thebans breaking through and pursuing, a rout of the entire Athenian army took place.”⁷⁶

The battle of Delium was a major military victory for the Boeotians, but the Athenians still held the fortified sanctuary of Apollo. Because the Boeotians had driven off the Athenian army, they were able to set up a battlefield trophy, collect their dead, and strip the armor from the enemy corpses – all of which were typical Greek customs. However, when the Athenians asked to collect their dead, the Boeotians refused and demanded that the Athenians abandon the sanctuary.⁷⁷ The Athenians replied that they held the sacred precinct as spear-won territory and claimed that the Boeotians were committing a greater outrage by bartering “corpses for holy places.”⁷⁸ After the failure of the post-battle negotiations, the Boeotians – along with allied contingents that joined them after the battle – besieged the fortified sanctuary at Delium. In the final, successful effort to take the sanctuary, the Boeotians constructed a large flamethrower, which they used to set fire to the wall and capture the fortified Athenian position.⁷⁹ Siege warfare had taken on an increasingly significant role over the course of the fifth century, usually with the Athenians leading the way. Now with further escalation of the Peloponnesian War, the Boeotians demonstrated their ability to innovate in tactics and siege weaponry.

The Boeotian victory at Delium provided a major windfall in captured arms, and led to the celebration of an annual festival called the Delia. Diodorus

explains that

from the value of the spoils, the Thebans built the great colonnade in their marketplace and decorated it with bronze statues. They covered in bronze the temples and the marketplace colonnades with the hoplite equipment stripped from the enemy and nailed up. They also were able to institute the Delian festival from these funds.⁸⁰



Figure 4.2 Boeotian grave stele

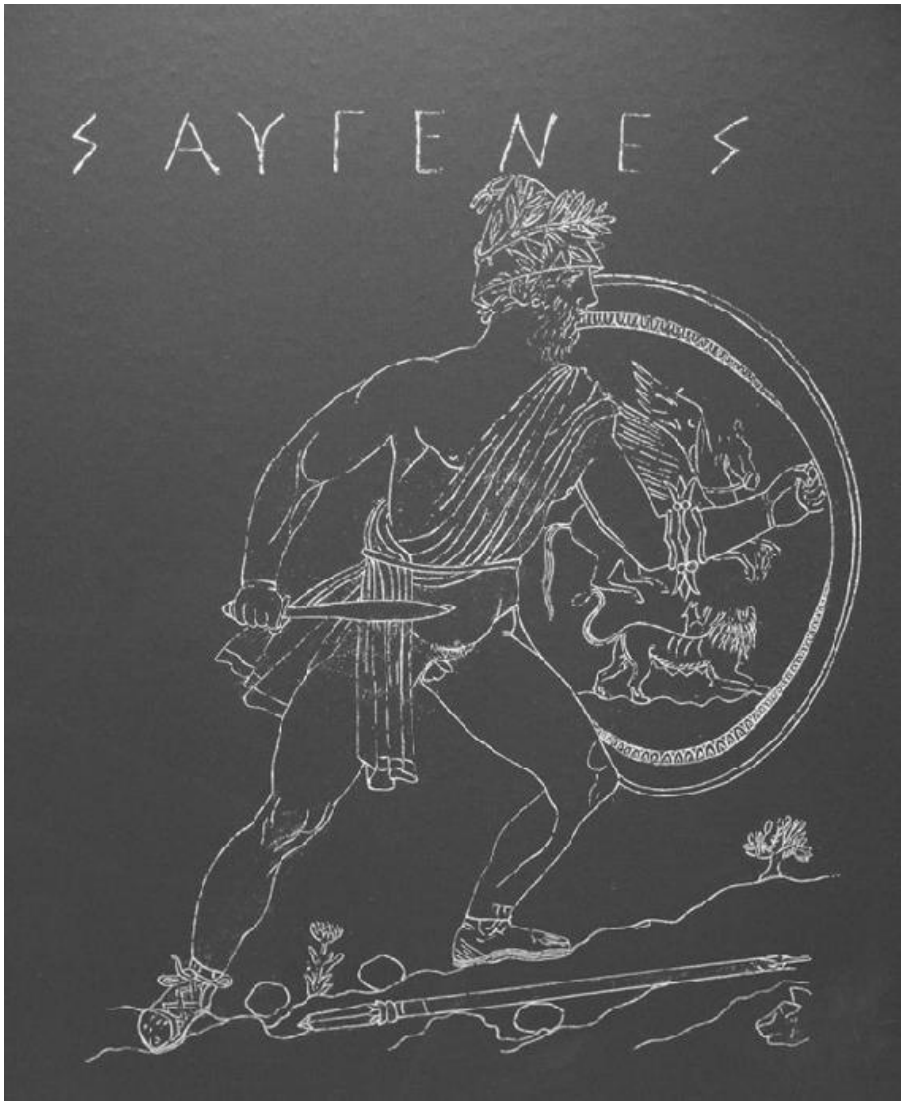


Figure 4.3 Reconstruction of Boeotian grave stele from a display at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes

Just as important as the economic benefit was the prestige the Thebans gained from decisively defeating the Athenians in combat.

The Thebans moved to capitalize on their victory almost immediately. In the following year, the Thebans tore down the walls of the Boeotian city of Thespieae on the charge of atticism – that is, siding with the Athenians. Thucydides says, “They had always wanted to do this, and now it was an easy matter since the flower of the Thespian army had died in the battle against the Athenians.”⁸¹ Undoubtedly, the Thebans wanted to forestall Athens or any

other foreign power from gaining a fortified position in Boeotia again.⁸² Nevertheless, this hostile action against another Boeotian city showed that the Thebans were just as willing as the Athenians to infringe on the autonomy of Greek cities.

Peace of Nicias (421)

After several more years of incessant fighting and the death of the two leading opponents of a Panhellenic peace agreement – Cleon of Athens and Brasidas of Sparta – both Athens and Sparta became amenable to peace talks.⁸³ Among other recent setbacks, Thucydides mentions that one of the main reasons the Athenians were willing to discuss peace was because their defeat at Delium had severely damaged their confidence in winning the war.⁸⁴ Athens and Sparta reached an agreement that all conquered territory should be returned, but the Thebans took exception to Plataea. According to Thucydides, “the Thebans said they took Plataea not by force or treachery but with the assent of those who supported them.”⁸⁵ As a result, the Boeotians – along with the Corinthians, Megarians, and Eleans – rejected the ensuing peace treaty known as the Peace of Nicias (421).⁸⁶ The Spartans and Athenians then formed a military alliance in an attempt to cement their commitment to the peace. The Boeotians agreed to an independent truce with Athens that had to be renewed every ten days.⁸⁷ The Peace of Nicias was supposed to last for fifty years, but all sides almost immediately began undermining the agreement.

Sparta’s Peloponnesian allies were particularly concerned that the Athenian–Spartan alliance would lead to their subjugation. Therefore, a plan was developed to create a counter alliance centered on Argos – one of the few cities to have remained neutral in the first ten years of the war. Argos was Sparta’s bitterest enemy and supposedly had aspired to the leadership of the Peloponnesus in the Archaic Age.⁸⁸ The Corinthians exploited Argos’s traditional enmity with Sparta, but unsuccessfully appealed to the Boeotians and Megarians to join the alliance. Thucydides explains that the Boeotians and Megarians “considered the Argive democracy less suitable to their oligarchies than the Spartan constitution.”⁸⁹

Yet, for a time it looked like the Boeotians would join the counter alliance. While Boeotian envoys were at Sparta, two Spartan ephors who wanted to break with Athens secretly communicated to them that they should enter into the alliance with Argos because the ephors themselves were going to convince the Spartans to ally with Argos. After the Boeotian envoys left Sparta, they were approached by two Argive leaders who said the same thing.⁹⁰ Thus, when the Boeotian envoys returned to Thebes, they discussed the diplomatic plans with the boeotarchs, who immediately worked to bring the Boeotians into an

alliance with Corinth as a preliminary to the alliance with Argos. The boeotarchs met with various envoys from Corinth, Megara, and even the Chalcidice, with all agreeing that they should become allies. "But before the oaths were taken," according to Thucydides, "the boeotarchs shared these proposals with the four councils of the Boeotians, which have ultimate authority, and recommended to take the oaths with whatever cities wished to join in helping them."⁹¹ The federal councils rejected the proposal because they were afraid of angering the Spartans. The boeotarchs did not reveal all the secret communications between the various diplomats because they thought that "even if they said nothing, the council[s] would not vote against what they had decided beforehand and recommended."⁹² The Boeotian councilors were particularly concerned that Sparta would be upset with Boeotia for allying with Corinth, which had recently fallen out with Sparta. Corinth had traditionally been Sparta's strongest ally in the Peloponnesian League, but after the Peace of Nicias Corinth had repeatedly defied Spartan policy. Since the boeotarchs could not get the federal councilors to ratify this preliminary alliance with Corinth, they did not even bring up the proposal to enter into an alliance with Argos.

The complicated diplomatic maneuvers at this time represent how important the balance of power was in Classical Greece. Once Athens and Sparta became allies, the other Greek powers immediately attempted to form their own alliance system to counterbalance the overwhelming military might of Athens and Sparta. Even though the Boeotians rejected the Corinthian alliance because they worried about causing a major break with Sparta, they did not blindly follow Sparta's lead. The Boeotians voted against the Peace of Nicias, but at the same time they gained a separate truce with Athens. They also refused to hand over the border fort of Panactum to the Spartans, who wanted to use it in exchange for recovering Pylos from the Athenians.⁹³ Panactum was a key fortification on the Athenian border the Boeotians had captured in 422.⁹⁴ The Boeotians claimed they would not hand over Panactum to Sparta unless Sparta made a separate alliance with them, which would be a violation of Sparta's agreement with Athens not to make war or peace without the consent of the other. Nevertheless, the Spartans were so keen on exchanging Panactum for Pylos that they granted the separate alliance. The other major reason Sparta entered into a separate alliance with Boeotia was because some Spartan leaders wanted to dissolve Sparta's alliance with Athens.⁹⁵

As it turned out, the Boeotians did hand over Panactum to the Spartans, but first they destroyed it. The Boeotians asserted they had an ancient agreement with the Athenians that the area was to be common grazing land and should not be inhabited. The Athenian prisoners from Panactum were also handed over to the Spartans, who returned them to Athens and at the same time

announced that the Boeotians had destroyed Panactum. This angered the Athenians who expected that Panactum would be restored to them intact. The Athenians also became upset when they found out that the Spartans had made a separate alliance with the Boeotians because the Spartans had promised to help force reluctant states to agree to the peace agreement.⁹⁶

In the summer of 419, the Boeotians again acted against Spartan interests, this time by expelling a Spartan commander from the Spartan colony of Heraclea in central Greece. According to Thucydides, “The Boeotians took control and sent away the Spartan Agesippidas for misgovernment. They were afraid that the Athenians would take the place while the Spartans were distracted with Peloponnesian affairs. Nevertheless, the Spartans were angry with them.”⁹⁷ Yet, the Boeotians and Spartans did not completely sever diplomatic ties. In fact, when a new alliance between Athens, Argos, Elis, and Mantinea threatened Sparta’s supremacy in the Peloponnesus in 418, the Boeotians sent soldiers to the Peloponnesus to help Sparta combat this new powerful coalition.⁹⁸ The infamous Athenian statesman Alcibiades had been instrumental in bringing about this alliance a year after the Peace of Nicias. Thucydides informs us that Alcibiades was upset that the Spartans chose to negotiate with his rivals – Nicias and Laches – instead of himself on account of his youth. He was particularly angry because he had taken up such a concern for the Spartan prisoners who had been taken on the island of Pylos in 424 in an attempt to revive his family’s diplomatic connection with Sparta.⁹⁹ While the Boeotians were in the Peloponnesus there were no major pitched battles, but their presence demonstrated that they were still committed Spartan allies. After the Boeotians returned home, the Spartans won a resounding victory at the battle of Mantinea, decisively defeating the combined forces of Athens, Argos, and Mantinea.¹⁰⁰ This famous hoplite battle significantly revived Sparta’s reputation as the foremost land power in Greece.

Fortification at Decelea (413)

Characteristically, the Spartans were slow to capitalize on their victory at Mantinea. It was not until five years later that the Spartans felt the time was right to renew their war against the Athenians. In 413, the Spartans enlisted the help of their allies to construct the fortification of Decelea in Attica, which lay roughly equidistant between the city of Athens and its border with Boeotia.¹⁰¹ According to Thucydides, Alcibiades had suggested this stratagem to the Spartans; Diodorus even claims that Alcibiades helped lead the Spartan invasion of Attica.¹⁰² This fort allowed the Spartans and their allies to cut the Athenians off from their territory and the overland route through Attica. Thucydides says the fortification at Decelea

greatly harmed the Athenians and ruined their affairs more than anything because of the destruction of property and personnel.... They had been deprived of their whole country: more than twenty thousand slaves had deserted – a great part of them skilled manual laborers – and all their sheep and draft animals had been lost. And since the cavalry rode out daily and made attacks against Decelea and guarded the country, their horses were either lamed by being continually worked on the hard ground or they were wounded.¹⁰³

And according to the Oxyrhynchus historian, this situation especially benefited the Boeotians because they were able to purchase slaves and other items cheaply and carry off valuable building materials such as timber and roof tiles from Attica, which was one of wealthiest territories at the time.¹⁰⁴ There was a huge financial incentive to wage war in ancient Greece. The Athenians had built up their fifth-century empire through war. The peerless Athenian navy dominated the Aegean Sea and ensured that allies in the Delian League paid the annual tribute or suffered the consequences. With its steady supply of tribute and continuous military action, Athens became one of the wealthiest cities in Greece.

Massacre at Mycalessus (413)

Nevertheless, there were limits even to Athens's finances. The Athenians had already spent two years on the Sicilian Expedition (415–413) in the hopes that they could add the wealth of Sicily to their empire. Now with the Spartans and their allies entrenched in Attica with the fort at Decelea, the Athenians had two separate wars to fight. In one of the more dramatic scenes in Thucydides's account of the Peloponnesian War, he narrates how the Athenians encouraged Thracian mercenaries – who had arrived too late to accompany reinforcements sent to Sicily – to plunder Boeotian territory. Thucydides asserts that because the Athenians were financially strained, they did not want to pay each of the thirteen hundred Thracians their wage of a drachma a day for the war in Attica.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, they sent the Thracians home under the command of an Athenian named Diitrephes, who was ordered to use the Thracian mercenaries to injure the enemy. As they sailed along the Boeotian coastline, Diitrephes had them disembark and make their way to the outskirts of the Boeotian city of Mycalessus. Spending the night just outside the city – which did not have adequate fortifications because it was some distance from the sea – Diitrephes led the Thracians in an early morning raid.¹⁰⁶ Thucydides describes the destruction of the small Boeotian city thus:

Bursting into Mycalessus the Thracians plundered the houses and temples

and butchered the inhabitants. They spared neither the elderly nor the young, killing all the children and women they happened upon, one after the other. They even killed draft animals and whatever other living creatures they saw. The Thracian race – similar to most barbarians – is most homicidal when it has nothing to fear. At that time, there was great confusion and every form of death. They even attacked the city's largest boys' school, where the children had just entered, and massacred them all. This disaster befalling the whole city was unsurpassed in its unexpectedness and terror.¹⁰⁷

When word reached the Thebans of the attack on Mycalessus, they immediately sent out cavalry and hoplite forces. When the Thebans arrived, they captured and killed the Thracians who were still in the city, and drove the remaining mercenaries back to their ships. Thucydides says that a great slaughter took place while the Thracians were trying to embark because their ships were moored off shore out of bowshot and the Thracians did not know how to swim. Altogether two hundred and fifty Thracians were killed, while twenty "Thebans and others who provided joint assistance" died in the engagement, including a Theban boeotarch named Scirphondas. Mycalessus lost a large proportion of its population in the attack, which compelled Thucydides to end his account in the following way: "Such were the events that occurred at Mycalessus. Considering the size of the city, there was no calamity more sorrowful during the war."¹⁰⁸ This was just one of many atrocities committed during the Peloponnesian War. In this instance, the Thebans were saving innocent lives and protecting the boundaries of Boeotia.

However, the Boeotians helped to fight in other theaters of war. Boeotian soldiers served in Sicily, where the Athenian campaign ended disastrously in the late summer of 413.¹⁰⁹ Soon after that, the Boeotians supported a revolt of the island of Lesbos from Athens by sending ten ships, which was not an insignificant number for a non-maritime power.¹¹⁰ The Spartans and their allies, however, did not have sufficient funds to maintain a fleet that could compete with Athens. So, they entered into an alliance with the Persians.¹¹¹ Tissaphernes – one of the Persian governors in Anatolia – was supposed to provide pay for the sailors of the Spartan-led fleet, but he was unreliable, causing endless disputes with the Spartans and their allies.¹¹² Closer to home, the Boeotians used the temporary weakness of Athens to seize the border city of Oropus in early 411.¹¹³

Oligarchic coup in Athens (411)

This was also the same year that an oligarchic coup succeeded in Athens. With

the devastating losses in Sicily and the financial support of the Persian Empire on the side of the Spartans, Athenian oligarchs were able to take control of the government.¹¹⁴ There was to be no pay for office and a Council of Four Hundred was to have supreme power in Athens.¹¹⁵ Thucydides famously remarks that “it was difficult to deprive the Athenian people of its freedom, almost one hundred years since the tyrants were deposed [510]. During this time, not only was it not subject to any, but for over half this time it was accustomed to ruling others.”¹¹⁶ The Athenian oligarchs used violence to gain power and stamp out any opposition. Eventually, however, the Four Hundred were overthrown because of failed negotiations with Sparta and mismanagement of the war effort, which ended with a major defeat off the coast of Euboea.¹¹⁷ After this naval defeat, the Athenians met in assembly and deposed the Four Hundred. According to Thucydides, “They voted to hand over affairs to the Five Thousand – as many as there were who supplied their own hoplite equipment – and that no one was to receive pay for any office, otherwise they made the person liable to a curse.” Thucydides then adds, “For the first time, at least in my lifetime, the Athenians seemed to have arranged their political system well. There was a moderate blending between the few and the many, and this was what first brought the city out of its troubled affairs.”¹¹⁸ The leading Athenian oligarchs of the Four Hundred fled to Decelea. In fact, one of the Athenian oligarchs – a general named Aristarchus – helped the Boeotians capture the Athenian border fort of Oenoe by falsely claiming the Athenians had come to terms with Sparta and ordered the garrison to hand over the fort to the Boeotians.¹¹⁹

Final years of the Peloponnesian War (410–404)

As it turned out, Athens did not come to terms with Sparta, miraculously surviving its many internal and external threats. The Athenians even restored full democracy by the summer of 410,¹²⁰ after its brief experiment with two different oligarchic regimes – the Four Hundred being much narrower and probably more violent than the Five Thousand. With a revived fleet and the considerable talent of Alcibiades – who was operating somewhat independently in the Aegean – the Athenians were able to score a series of significant naval victories. At last in 407 they recalled Alcibiades and elected him general with supreme powers. Significantly, however, this was the same year that Lysander – an equally talented Spartan military leader – began his Aegean naval command. He secured a steady supply of Persian money through his friendship with Cyrus the Younger, the recently appointed governor in Anatolia and second son of the Persian king. Lysander defeated the Athenian fleet at Notium in 406, which led to the Athenians exiling Alcibiades again

even though he was not present at the battle.

In the same year, the Athenians won a resounding victory at Arginusae near the island of Lesbos. According to Diodorus, a Theban named Thrasondas commanded the left wing against the Athenians, with Boeotians constituting a large and important contingent.¹²¹ Despite the Athenian victory, the aftermath of the battle of Arginusae became a classic example of the perils of direct democracy. A major storm broke out following the naval engagement, which hindered the Athenian generals from collecting the survivors and dead from the wrecked ships. As a result, the Athenians recalled the generals, though some did not return, and voted to execute them. Despite some members of the assembly declaring this an illegal action, Xenophon states, “The multitude shouted that it was terrible if someone prevented the people from doing whatever it wished.”¹²² After considerable debate, the Athenians decided to put to death the victorious generals from Arginusae – they later repented, but the decision to try all the generals with one vote of the assembly and without due process of the law became an object lesson of mob rule.¹²³ Even so, the Athenian democracy on balance was no more unjust or willful than the oligarchies of Sparta or Thebes. In fact, in many respects the direct democracy at Athens was superior to the oligarchies of Sparta and Thebes. The Athenians continually rebounded from catastrophic losses and misguided policies, which at least in part may be attributed to the open, dynamic, inclusive, and resilient nature of the Athenian democracy.¹²⁴

Yet, there were limits to Athens’s ability to constantly recover from its setbacks, and eventually the Spartans and their allies found a way to decisively defeat the Athenians at sea. One of the major theaters of action in the later stages of the Peloponnesian War was at the Hellespont – the narrow sea lane in the northeast Aegean that provided access to the abundant resources of the Black Sea region. Ultimately, the decisive naval action occurred in the narrow strait at a place called Aegospotami in 405. The Spartan general Lysander was able to catch the Athenians off guard by continually refusing to engage in battle. Then, suddenly he ordered his ships to attack the Athenian fleet as it lay at rest on the shore and the crews were off searching for provisions. Lysander managed to capture almost the entire Athenian fleet, decisively ending Athens’s ability to continue the war.¹²⁵ Lysander instituted a policy to starve the Athenians into submission by sending captured Athenians back to Athens and maintaining tight control over the Aegean Sea.¹²⁶ Before the Athenians surrendered, however, the Spartans convened a meeting of their allies at Sparta. Many Greek envoys – especially those from Corinth and Thebes – suggested destroying Athens, but the Spartans refused because of Athens’s contributions to Greece during the Persian Wars.¹²⁷ Eventually, Lysander secured Athens’s capitulation and was able to sail into the Athenian port of

the Piraeus. As Xenophon famously declares, “They dismantled the walls with great zeal accompanied by flute-girls, believing that day was the beginning of freedom for all of Greece.”¹²⁸

Thirty Tyrants in Athens (404/3)

In actual fact, immediate and subsequent events proved this notion to be false. In Athens, an oppressive regime was established that came to be known as the Thirty Tyrants.¹²⁹ These pro-Spartan Athenian leaders resorted to ever-increasing acts of violence backed by a Spartan garrison. At first, members of the Thirty Tyrants oversaw the arrest and execution of disreputable individuals, such as demagogues who had maligned the upper classes under the democracy. But in time, the Thirty Tyrants went after anybody who might cause trouble for the regime.¹³⁰ This caused many Athenians to flee the city. Surprisingly, the Thebans granted asylum to many of these exiles, showing how quickly Greek states changed their policies toward one another.¹³¹ The Thirty Tyrants drew up a list of three thousand Athenians who would share in governing the city, and then proceeded to disarm the rest of the citizenry. Xenophon writes,

After these things were done, it was now possible for them to do whatever they wanted. They condemned many men to death – some out of personal hatred and some for their wealth. Also, in order to have money to give to the garrison troops, they decided that each of them should seize one of the resident aliens, execute them, and confiscate their property.¹³²

Soon, however, a small group of Athenian exiles set out from Thebes led by an Athenian named Thrasybulus. They first took control of an important fort on the border between Boeotia and Attica; then they marched to the Piraeus and took up an advantageous position in the harbor region.¹³³ After inconclusive clashes between the forces of Thrasybulus and those of the Thirty, both sides appealed to the Spartans to intervene. Two separate Spartan forces became involved in the conflict, one under the leadership of Lysander and the other under the Spartan king Pausanias, who called on all of Sparta’s allies to join the military campaign. The Boeotians and Corinthians, however, refused because they said the Athenians were not violating the peace agreement reached at the end of the war.¹³⁴ After further fighting, the Spartans helped to reconcile the warring factions in Athens, which led to the expulsion of the Thirty and the restoration of democracy in Athens.¹³⁵ The Spartans probably realized controlling Athens through a narrow oligarchy was untenable. Also, they may have foreseen future trouble with their former ally Thebes.

Under Theban leadership, the Boeotians openly defied the Spartans on this

and other occasions. Xenophon tells us that the Thebans were the ones who persuaded the Corinthians not to join the expedition; the Thebans also appropriated the religious tithe from Decelea, in a clear power play with Sparta to declare themselves responsible for the victory in the war in Attica.¹³⁶ When the Spartans launched another military campaign in the Peloponnesus soon after the war, the Boeotians refused again to send any troops.¹³⁷ All of these actions foreshadowed a major break with Sparta, and in less than a decade Thebes would be at war with Sparta.

Notes

- 1 Hdt. 6.118. For recent discussion and earlier bibliography on this episode, see Mackil 2013, 189–192.
- 2 Plut. *Them.* 20.3–4. Cf. Schachter 2016, 70.
- 3 Thuc. 1.107.4. The Athenian Long Walls, constructed at the beginning of the First Peloponnesian War, connected the city of Athens with its ports. After the conclusion of the war, a third wall was built that ran parallel to the earlier Piraeus wall: the parallel walls to the Piraeus, which was Athens’s main port, were roughly 6.5 kilometers long and around 180 meters apart. The Athenian Long Walls greatly enhanced Athens’s naval program and were seen as strengthening the Athenian democracy, although oligarchic Corinth also built its own Long Walls. See Fornara 1983, no. 79; Hornblower 1991–2008, 1.167.
- 4 Diod. 11.81.1–3.
- 5 Cf. Polyb. 12.25 ff.
- 6 Thuc. 1.108.2. Oenophyta was probably located in the same general area as Tanagra.
- 7 Diod. 11.82.2–3.
- 8 Diod. 11.80–83.1.
- 9 Cf. Paus. 1.29.6, 1.29.9.
- 10 Thuc. 1.108.3; Diod. 11.82.5.
- 11 Fowler 1957; Kraay 1976, 110. However, too much should not be made of this evidence because there are uncertainties in dating Boeotian coins: Hansen and Nielsen 2004, 432–433; Larson 2007, 68–73. For bibliography on early Boeotian coinage, see Beck and Ganter 2015, 138 n. 22.
- 12 Diod. 11.82.5.
- 13 Cf. Thuc. 3.62.4; Gomme et al. 1945–1981, 1.318; Gehrke 1985, 165–167; Hornblower 1991–2008, 1.172; Beck 1997, 89; Robinson 2011, 53–54.
- 14 [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 3.11. Cf. Moore [1983] 2010, 58.
- 15 Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1292b 5–10.

- 16 Arist. *Pol.* 1302b 27–30. Cf. Diod. 11.83.1.
- 17 Arist. *Pol.* 1278a 25–26, 1321a 28–29.
- 18 Hdt. 1.29.
- 19 For references, see Hornblower 1991–2008, 1.172.
- 20 Thuc. 1.113.1–4. Cf. Diod. 12.6.
- 21 Larsen 1960, 11; 1968, 33.
- 22 Thuc. 3.62.5. Cf. Plut. *Ages.* 19.2; Buck 1979, 150.
- 23 Symeonoglou 1985, 120.
- 24 Diod. 11.81.3.
- 25 Thuc. 1.103.4, 1.107.1, 1.108.3; Fornara 1983, no. 79.
- 26 Diod. 11.83.1.
- 27 *Hell. Oxy.* 20.3. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.3; Plut. *Mor.* 594E.
- 28 Cf. Thuc. 2.7.1, 7.18.2.
- 29 Thuc. 2.2.4.
- 30 Thuc. 2.2.1. Cf. Hdt. 7.233.2. For epigraphic evidence of the title boeotarch provisionally dated to the first half of the fifth century, see Aravantinos 2014, 199–202. For illustration, see Figure 5.1.
- 31 Thuc. 4.91. Cf. *Hell. Oxy.* 19.3.
- 32 Thuc. 5.38.2–3.
- 33 Thuc. 2.3.1–2. It is uncertain if Plataea was ever a member of the Boeotian federation. Cf. Mackil 2014, 53 n. 28; Beck and Ganter 2015, 145.
- 34 Thuc. 2.4.2.
- 35 Thuc. 2.4–5.
- 36 Thuc. 2.7.1.
- 37 For an extensive description of what is often referred to as the plague in Athens, see Thuc. 2.47–54.
- 38 Cf. Thuc. 3.62.4, 3.68.4.
- 39 Thuc. 2.71.2. For discussion of the oath and battle of Plataea in 479, see Cartledge 2013.
- 40 Thuc. 2.72.1.
- 41 Thuc. 2.73.2–3.
- 42 Thuc. 2.75–78.
- 43 Thuc. 3.20–24.
- 44 Thuc. 3.24.2, 3.55.3; Dem. 59.104.
- 45 See Hornblower 1991–2008, 1.449–450. Cf. Lys. 23. Greek cities tended to be very reluctant to extend citizenship to outsiders. Generally, even an open city like Athens only granted citizen status under extraordinary circumstances.
- 46 Cf. Hornblower 1991–2008, 1.442–443.
- 47 Thuc. 3.52.2.
- 48 Thuc. 3.53.4. Cf. Thuc. 3.58.1.

- 49 Thuc. 3.55.1. Cf. Hdt. 6.108.1–3.
- 50 Thuc. 3.56.4.
- 51 Thuc. 3.56.2–3.
- 52 Thuc. 3.61.1.
- 53 Thuc. 3.61.2. The Thebans elide some seven hundred years of history: cf. Thuc. 1.12.3, 3.68.4; Hdt. 6.108.
- 54 Thuc. 3.62.1–2. Cf. Hdt. 8.30.
- 55 Thuc. 3.62.3–4. See Hornblower 1991–2008, 1.455–457.
- 56 Thuc. 3.63.2–3.
- 57 Thuc. 3.65.2.
- 58 Thuc. 3.65.3.
- 59 Thuc. 2.37.1.
- 60 [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1.2. Cf. Thuc. 1.143.1–2.
- 61 Thuc. 3.66.2.
- 62 Cf. Thuc. 5.31.6.
- 63 Thuc. 3.68.1–2.
- 64 Thuc. 3.68.4.
- 65 Thuc. 3.68.3. By leasing land to Thebans the city of Thebes may have been trying to strengthen its oligarchic institutions, which were based on participants having a certain amount of property: *Hell. Oxy.* 19.2. Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1278a 25–26, 1321a 28–29.
- 66 Thuc. 3.91.3–5, 3.95.1.
- 67 Thuc. 4.76.2. Cf. Hornblower 1991–2008, 2.249–250.
- 68 See Maps 3 and 4.
- 69 Thuc. 4.76.3–5.
- 70 Thuc. 4.90.2.
- 71 Thuc. 4.91.
- 72 Thuc. 4.92.3.
- 73 Thuc. 4.92.7.
- 74 Thuc. 4.93.3–4.94.1. Thucydides says there were over ten thousand Boeotian light-armed soldiers at Delium. For passing references to the Athenian light-armed troops, see Thuc. 4.90.4, 4.101.2. Six years later, five thousand Boeotian light-armed soldiers accompanied five thousand Boeotian hoplites into the Peloponnesus: Thuc. 5.57.2.
- 75 Thuc. 4.96.4.
- 76 Thuc. 4.96.5–6. Cf. Diod. 12.69–70. Diodorus’s account of Delium generally follows that of Thucydides.
- 77 Thuc. 4.97.
- 78 Thuc. 4.98.7.
- 79 Thuc. 4.100.
- 80 Diod. 12.70.5. Modern scholars have estimated that the average hoplite

panoply cost somewhere between seventy-five to one hundred drachmas – a drachma being the average daily wage for a laborer in the fifth century. Thus, the Thebans acquired in one fell swoop the wealth equivalent to what seventy-five thousand to one hundred thousand full days of labor would generate.

- 81 Thuc. 4.133.1. The Thespian contingent had been stationed on the left wing at Delium and had suffered major casualties: Thuc. 4.96.3.
- 82 In 414 the Thebans had to put down a democratic coup in Thespieae, which probably was another attempt by the Athenians to gain a foothold in Boeotia: Thuc. 6.95.2.
- 83 Thuc. 5.16.1.
- 84 Thuc. 5.14.1. Cf. Thuc. 5.15.2.
- 85 Thuc. 5.17.2.
- 86 Nicias was a leading Athenian politician who helped secure the peace, which was also known as the Fifty Years' Peace. For the locations of the cities that abstained from the peace agreement, see Map 1 Regions and cities.
- 87 Thuc. 5.26.2, 5.32.5–7. See Hornblower 1991–2008, 3.47–48 for bibliography and discussion of the possibility that envoys and guest-friends could renew the ten-day truce, which would lessen the amount of travel involved in maintaining this separate truce.
- 88 Thuc. 5.27–29. Argos had agreed to a peace treaty with Sparta during the First Peloponnesian War and it was about to expire.
- 89 Thuc. 5.31.6. Concerning ancient Greek ideas about choosing between democracy or oligarchy, P. J. Rhodes (1985, 37) says,

The desire for democracy or oligarchy is not necessarily the most important element in a man's political thinking; and we ought at least to distinguish between democratic political leaders, who often owed their supremacy in their cities to Athenian support and might welcome their cities' links with Athens for that reason, and ordinary lower-class citizens, for whom a democratic constitution would be one factor to be thrown into the balance, but not necessarily the decisive factor.

- 90 Thuc. 5.36–37.
- 91 Thuc. 5.38.2.
- 92 Thuc. 5.38.3.
- 93 Thuc. 5.36.2.
- 94 Thuc. 5.3.5.
- 95 Thuc. 5.39.2–3.
- 96 Thuc. 5.42.
- 97 Thuc. 5.52.1. Cf. Diod. 12.77.4. The Spartans had founded their colony of

Heraclea in 426 not far from the pass of Thermopylae, which would have allowed the Spartans to control the overland route through central Greece as well as protect the nearby region of Doris, the purported homeland of the Spartans. Thucydides (3.92) says the Spartans thought a fleet could be assembled in the area since the fortified colony was near the sea. However, Heraclea never proved to be a major threat to Athenian interests in the region because the Thessalians continually harassed the settlement and the Spartan governors ruled harshly and unfairly, which drove off most of the population: Thuc. 3.93.2. This was an all-too-common charge against Spartan governors. Despite Sparta's repeated claims during the Peloponnesian War to be fighting to liberate the Greeks, Greek communities often found the Spartans to be more oppressive than the Athenians: Thuc. 1.95, 3.32.1–2, cf. 2.8.4, 5.75.3.

- 98 Thuc. 5.43–47, 5.57.2, 5.58.4, 5.59.2, 5.60.3–4.
- 99 Thuc. 5.43.2.
- 100 Thuc. 5.65–74. Cf. Thuc. 5.64.4.
- 101 Thuc. 7.19.2.
- 102 Thuc. 6.91.6–7, 7.18.1; Diod. 13.9.2.
- 103 Thuc. 7.27.3–5. For discussion and bibliography on this passage, see Hornblower 1991–2008, 3.589–592.
- 104 *Hell. Oxy.* 20.4–5.
- 105 Thuc. 7.27.1–2, 7.29.1.
- 106 Thuc. 7.29.2–3.
- 107 Thuc. 7.29.4–5.
- 108 Thuc. 7.30.
- 109 Thuc. 7.19.3, 7.25.3, 7.43.7, 7.57.5, 7.58.3.
- 110 Thuc. 8.5.2. Cf. Thuc. 8.3.2.
- 111 Thuc. 8.18, 8.37, 8.58.
- 112 Thuc. 8.29, 8.45, 8.78, 8.80.1, 8.83. Alcibiades very likely contributed to Tissaphernes's behavior. Similar to how he had given the Spartans the idea to fortify Decelea, he advised Tissaphernes not only to lower the pay for the crews but also to pay them irregularly so that they would not desert: Thuc. 8.45.2. It was not until 407 when Cyrus the Younger – a son of the Persian king – was appointed governor in Anatolia that Persian money made a decisive difference in the war: Thuc. 2.65.12; Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.3, 1.5.2–7.
- 113 Thuc. 8.60.1. Cf. 2.23.3, 7.28.1; Hornblower 1991–2008, 1.279; Hansen and Nielsen 2004, no. 214.
- 114 Alcibiades played a role in the oligarchic coup. While in exile and with the hope of being recalled to Athens, he originally suggested that if Athens were to become an oligarchy he would be able to secure Persia's

support: Thuc. 8.47–49.

115 Thuc. 8.67.3. Cf. Thuc. 5.38.2; *Hell. Oxy.* 19.2–4.

116 Thuc. 8.68.4.

117 Thuc. 8.95.

118 Thuc. 8.97.1–2. For a good discussion of this passage and the earlier bibliography, see Hornblower 1991–2008, 3.1032–1036. Cf. Lys. 20.13; Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.48; Diod. 13.38.2.

119 Thuc. 8.98; Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.28.

120 Andoc. 1.96–98.

121 Diod. 13.98.4, 13.99.6.

122 Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.12.

123 Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.34–35. Cf. Hdt. 5.97.2.

124 Cf. Hdt. 5.78; Thuc. 2.37.

125 Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.21–28; Diod. 13.105–106.7. Pausanias (10.9.9) says a Boeotian named Erianthes was one of several prominent individuals who contributed to the victory at Aegospotami.

126 Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.2.

127 Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.19–20. Plutarch (*Lys.* 15.2) claims that Erianthes, the Boeotian commander at Aegospotami, was one of the envoys who advocated for the destruction of Athens.

128 Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.23. Cf. Plut. *Lys.* 15.

129 For a contemporary perspective on the Thirty Tyrants, see Lys. 12, 13.

130 Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.12–14.

131 Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.1; Diod. 14.6.3. For further references, see Krentz 1995, 140, 150.

132 Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.21.

133 Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.2, 2.4.10.

134 Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.30.

135 Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.36–43.

136 Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.5.

137 Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.25; Diod. 14.17.7.

5 Classical Thebes (404–371 BCE)

Following the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War, the Spartans became the most powerful city in Greece, ushering in a period known as the Spartan Hegemony (404–371). Almost immediately the Thebans turned against their former allies the Spartans,¹ and by the early fourth century they helped bring about a Panhellenic war against Sparta called the Corinthian War (395–386). Most of the fighting occurred around the city of Corinth, thus giving the war its name.² By the end of the war, all sides were forced to sign a peace agreement brokered by the Persian king Artaxerxes II who supported Sparta as the hegemonic power in Greece. In return for Persian support, the Spartans allowed the Persians to reclaim control over Greek cities in Anatolia, but in mainland Greece all cities were to be free and autonomous. This meant that the Thebans had to disband the Boeotian federation. Sparta was particularly concerned that Thebes would use the Boeotian federation to undermine Sparta's leading position in Greece. In fact, the Spartans were so concerned about a resurgent Thebes that four years after the end of hostilities in the Corinthian War, they sent armed forces into Thebes and installed a garrison on the sacred Cadmea. For three years Spartan troops backed a narrow pro-Spartan oligarchy in Thebes. However, in 379 anti-Spartan exiles secretly returned to Thebes and assassinated the pro-Spartan leaders and helped lead a revolt against the Spartan garrison. The Thebans managed to expel the Spartan garrison but this sparked another extended conflict known as the Boeotian War (378–371), during which the Spartans repeatedly invaded Boeotian territory in an attempt to curb Theban ambitions. Finally, however, in 371 the Thebans decisively defeated the Spartans on the field of battle at Leuctra and ended Spartan power in Classical Greece.

Corinthian War (395–386)

By the outbreak of the Corinthian War, Thebes had firm control over Boeotian affairs and continually opposed the actions of its former ally Sparta. Most

recently Thebes had refused to send troops for Spartan campaigns in Anatolia.³ In fact, a year before the outbreak of war, boeotarchs had gone so far as to openly humiliate the Spartan king Agesilaus when he attempted to sacrifice at the Boeotian seaport of Aulis before sailing to Anatolia.⁴ Agesilaus was on his way to campaign in Anatolia against the Persians, but was later recalled after Thebes, Athens, Corinth, and Argos formed a coalition to wage war on Sparta.⁵

In many ways, fourth-century Sparta was similar to fifth-century Athens, in that both cities used their military power to infringe on the autonomy and freedom of fellow Greek states. At the end of the Peloponnesian War, the Spartans had installed military governors and garrisons – as well as oligarchic boards of ten men called *decarchies* – to maintain control in cities throughout the Greek world. At some point before the Corinthian War, the Spartans had abolished the decarchies because of the hostility they provoked, but they still maintained military governors and garrisons in many cities.⁶ Members of the anti-Spartan coalition expected that the ill-will felt toward the Spartans would galvanize other Greek states into fighting against Sparta. Persian envoys had also promised funding for their armies because the Spartans were continually attacking Persian territory in Anatolia.⁷

All of these factors contributed to the likelihood of war, but the open declaration of war only came after the Thebans invaded neighboring Phocis, an ally of Sparta. Against Spartan demands, Thebes intervened in a conflict between Phocis and Locris and ravaged the land of Phocis.⁸ The Oxyrhynchus historian claims that at this time the anti-Spartan faction was in power in Thebes and was accused of being pro-Athenian because it supported “the people when it was in exile. However, the anti-Spartan leaders were not concerned for the Athenians.”⁹ Unfortunately, the papyrus is badly damaged after this point, but in a later comment the Oxyrhynchus historian reveals that the anti-Spartan faction was eager to go to war with Sparta so that it would not be swept aside by the pro-Spartan faction.¹⁰ Thus, political expediency seems to have been more important than any dogmatic attachment to a particular ideology. In fact, the Oxyrhynchus historian refers to the leaders of both the pro- and anti-Spartan factions in terms usually reserved for oligarchs, calling them “the best and most notable of the citizens.”¹¹ There would have been little incentive for political revolution in Boeotia at the time, the region had benefited greatly from the Peloponnesian War and was fairly stable because of the type of oligarchy practiced in Thebes and Boeotia.

Boeotian federation (395)

The Oxyrhynchus historian, in fact, provides a detailed description of the political arrangement in Boeotia at this time, which is the most extensive

account of an actual oligarchy to have survived from ancient Greece. In the context of events of 395, the Oxyrhynchus historian says,

At that time Boeotian affairs were as follows: Four councils were established at that time in each of the cities. It was not possible for all citizens to participate in these, but only those who had acquired a certain amount of property. Each of these councils sat in turn and deliberated about the matters it would refer to the other three. What seemed best to all was ratified.¹²

The author does not specify how much property a citizen needed to participate in local government, but scholars frequently assume it was equivalent to a hoplite census.¹³ When the Oxyrhynchus historian moves on to a discussion of the federal level, he seems to link political participation with hoplite and cavalry service.¹⁴ At this time, the lower classes probably were not allowed to sit on the local and federal councils, even though they served in the military in large numbers as light-armed soldiers.¹⁵

The Oxyrhynchus historian says Boeotia was divided into eleven districts – with each district providing one thousand hoplites and one hundred cavalymen, and responsible for sending one federal magistrate called a *boeotarch* (“leader of Boeotia”) and sixty councilors to federal meetings at Thebes. He then adds somewhat ambiguously, “They paid their daily expenses.”¹⁶ This probably means that the officials paid their own expenses, which was a common characteristic of oligarchies in Greece.¹⁷ This worked in tandem with hoplites and cavalymen providing their own military equipment as well. However, the Oxyrhynchus historian also says,

To put it simply, depending on the archon, they benefited from the federation, paid taxes, appointed jurors, and shared in all things equally – both good and bad. So the entire people governed in this way, and the councils and the treasury of the Boeotians were convened on the Cadmea.¹⁸



Figure 5.1 Votive offering of a Theban boeotarch (early fifth century BCE)

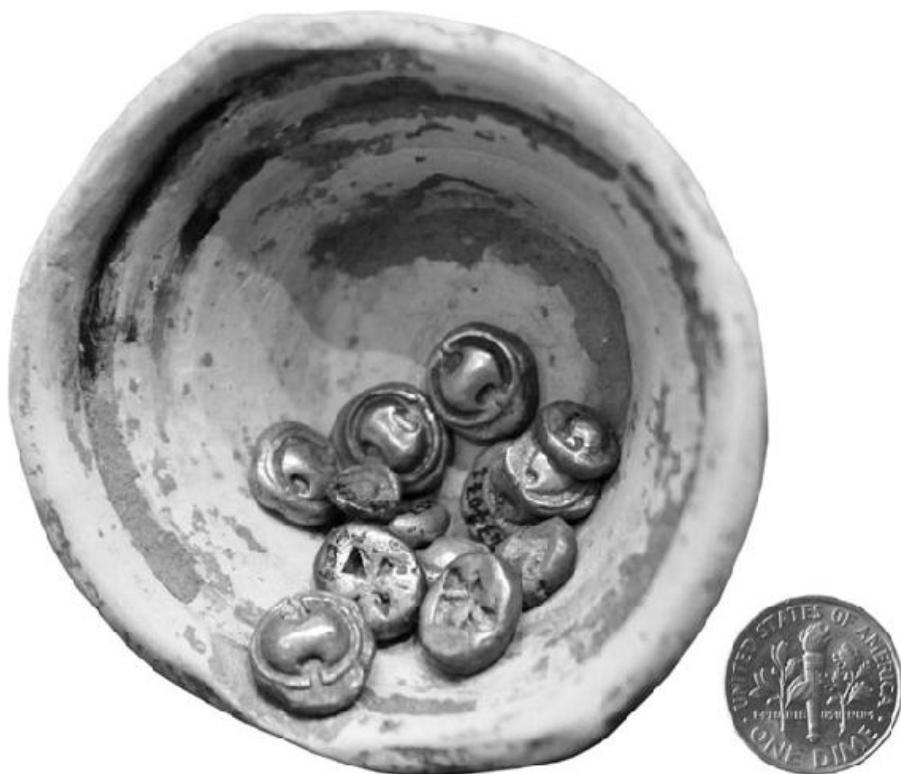


Figure 5.2 Boeotian coins with a US ten-cent coin (17.91 mm in diameter) for

Without a doubt Thebes was the dominant member of the Boeotian federation. Not only were federal meetings held at Thebes, but the city also controlled four out of the eleven districts. The other districts listed by the Oxyrhynchus historian were apportioned in the following way: Orchomenus and its dependent territory accounted for two districts; Thespieae and its surrounding territory constituted two; Tanagra was considered one district; three cities along Lake Copais were grouped together as one district; and another three made up another district.¹⁹ Thus, on an annual basis the Boeotians had eleven boeotarchs, six hundred and sixty councilors, eleven thousand hoplites, and one thousand cavalrymen available to serve the federal state. In addition, there were probably over ten thousand light-armed troops in Boeotia.²⁰ This large manpower base undoubtedly was one of the main reasons Thebes was confident enough to provoke a war with Sparta in 395.

Haliartus (395)

In the first year of the Corinthian War, the Spartans invaded Boeotian territory and a major engagement took place near the city of Haliartus.²¹ The Spartan military leader Lysander had invaded from Phocis with forces that included soldiers from Orchomenus.²² Lysander arrived ahead of the Spartan king Pausanias – who was leading the Peloponnesian army into Boeotia – and tried to persuade the Haliartans to revolt from Thebes. When they refused because of Thebans stationed on the city wall, Lysander attacked Haliartus without waiting for reinforcements.²³ Xenophon tells us that

after the Thebans heard this, their hoplites and cavalry marched out to help at a run. It is uncertain whether Lysander saw them coming when they attacked him, or whether he was aware of their presence and held his ground thinking he could defeat them. Nevertheless, it is clear there was a battle at the wall and a trophy stands beside the gates of the Haliartans. After Lysander was killed, the rest of his soldiers fled to the mountains and the Thebans vigorously pursued them.²⁴

The Theban forces continued to pursue the fleeing troops up a mountainside, but because of the difficult terrain over two hundred Thebans were killed.²⁵

The Spartan king Pausanias eventually arrived but so did Athenian forces – Athens had recently entered into an alliance with Thebes. Pausanias and his Spartan officials were uncertain what course of action to take because Lysander had been killed in battle and his army had been driven into the mountains. Furthermore, the Corinthians – who were usually staunch Spartan

allies – had refused to join the expedition, and the troops that were present apparently were not eager to fight a battle. There were also many more enemy cavalrymen. Most important, however, was the fact that it would have been extremely difficult to recover the corpses lying near the city wall. Xenophon tells us, “For all these reasons, then, they decided to recover the corpses under truce.”²⁶ For Pausanias to ask for a truce meant admitting defeat. Even so, the Thebans adamantly refused until the Spartans agreed to evacuate Boeotia.²⁷ Pausanias accepted the terms and returned to Sparta. However, he was soon charged with committing a capital offense and was banished from Sparta and died in exile.²⁸ The battle of Haliartus was one of the first indications that Thebes would be Sparta’s most formidable opponent in fourth-century Greece.

Nemea River (394)

In the following year, the Thebans participated in two major land battles against the Spartans. By this point, Thebes had helped build a strong anti-Spartan coalition with Athens, Corinth, and Argos. The first engagement took place in the Peloponnesus at the Nemea River. Xenophon says the Boeotians had five thousand hoplites and eight hundred cavalry present at the battle, and that the Orchomenians remained detached from the Boeotian federation.²⁹ In arraying for battle, Xenophon claims that the Boeotians initially were reluctant to join battle because they were stationed on the left wing opposite the Spartans: “But when the Athenians were opposite the Spartans, and the Boeotians held the right wing and were arrayed against the Achaeans, the Boeotians immediately said the sacrifices were favorable and gave the command to prepare for battle.”³⁰ This is one of the many clear instances of a strong anti-Theban bias in Xenophon’s *Hellenica*.³¹ The most likely explanation for the behavior of the Boeotians was that they had to wait until they held the command of the coalition forces to order the charge – the right wing was usually reserved for overall command of a Greek army. Xenophon adds that the Boeotians disregarded an earlier agreement with the allies not to array their hoplites more than sixteen rows deep and “made their phalanx excessively deep.”³² Reviving the successful tactic from the battle of Delium in 424, the Boeotians stacked in deep formation to punch through the opposing ranks of the enemy.³³ However, this caused a major disruption in the cohesion of the coalition forces because the Boeotian units also edged to the right – this was the general tendency of Greek armies,³⁴ but for Xenophon it was an example of the Boeotians’ disregard for their allies.

In the ensuing battle, the Spartans also edged to the right. Outflanking the Athenians and advancing with their lines unbroken, they swept the battlefield, defeating all units they came across. In the initial stages of the battle, the

Argives, Corinthians, and Boeotians apparently defeated the units they faced, but as they returned from pursuing the Spartan allies, the Spartans were able to strike them on their unprotected sides and killed many of them. The Spartans declared victory and erected a battlefield trophy.³⁵ The Spartan victory at the Nemea River provided a prime example of the importance of maintaining ordered ranks in hoplite combat. Although the Spartans increasingly made up only a small fraction of the soldiers in any given army, their leaders and disciplined units demonstrated the superiority of professional training in Greek warfare. Full Spartan citizens had no other profession than war, which proved decisive for much of the Classical Age.

Coronea (394)

The next major battle of the Corinthian War took place in the heart of Boeotian territory. After the defeat at the Nemea River, the allies decided to confront another Spartan-led army under the leadership of the Spartan king Agesilaus. He had been campaigning against the Persians in Anatolia when he was ordered back to Greece to face the coalition forces. Interestingly, both Xenophon and Diodorus remark on the fact that on his return to Greece Agesilaus followed the same path that Xerxes did when he invaded in 480.³⁶

By late summer of 394, Agesilaus arrived on the northwest border of Boeotia.³⁷ Eventually the two sides clashed near the Boeotian city of Coronea, where over fifty years earlier the Boeotians had fought against and defeated Athenian forces.³⁸ Now Athens and Thebes were working together to bring an end to Sparta's hegemony in Greece. The Thebans were stationed on the right wing facing their former Boeotian allies the Orchomenians. The Spartans were marshaled on their right wing opposite the Argives. In a similar fashion to the battle at the Nemea River, the Thebans seem to have led the initial charge. Xenophon states, "The Thebans raised the war cry and came to close quarters on the run."³⁹ The Thebans were victorious on their right wing, as were the Spartans on their right wing. Then both victorious contingents wheeled around and smashed head on. Xenophon succinctly sums up this second brutal encounter in the following way: "Crashing their shields together, they shoved, fought, killed, and died."⁴⁰ Xenophon claims that the Thebans were simply trying to reunite with their allies who had fled to nearby Mount Helicon. Yet, based on other recorded military engagements involving the Thebans, it seems they were trying to strike a decisive blow against the enemy. The Spartan king Agesilaus was badly injured in the conflict and had to be carried from the battlefield. Nevertheless, the Spartan-led army was able to claim victory, setting up a trophy and granting the Thebans and their allies a truce to recover their dead.⁴¹ As a result, Coronea turned out to be further confirmation of

Sparta's superiority as a land power.

Prior to this battle, however, the Spartans had suffered a devastating naval defeat off the coast of Anatolia at Cnidus.⁴² Agesilaus had actually been informed of this defeat before he marched into Boeotia, but ordered the troops to be told that the Spartan fleet had been victorious.⁴³ The Spartan defeat at Cnidus meant the loss of Sparta's control of the Aegean and a revival of Athenian naval aspirations. The Athenians rebuilt their walls, and another war of attrition commenced with much of the fighting occurring in the territory of Corinth. Besides the battles of Haliartus and Coronea, no other major battle took place in Boeotia during the war. With Thebes's ally Athens resurgent at sea and powerful allies like Corinth and Argos drawing the attention of Sparta, the Spartans and their allies did not make another attempt to invade Boeotian territory.⁴⁴

The Boeotians, however, continually sent soldiers into the Peloponnesus in support of their allies. They provided garrison troops for the Corinthian harbor of Lechaeum, which was connected to the city via Long Walls.⁴⁵ The Spartans for their part used the nearby city of Sicyon as their base of operations to attack Corinthian territory.⁴⁶ In 392, Corinthian exiles let Spartan forces into the Long Walls running from Corinth to Lechaeum. Once inside, the Spartans and their allies defeated enemy troops and apparently seized the harbor of Lechaeum, killing the Boeotian guards.⁴⁷ Xenophon adds, "After this battle, both sides ceased to mobilize large armies of citizens. Instead, they sent garrisons, some to Corinth, others to Sicyon, and these kept watch over the walls of those cities. Each side did, however, employ mercenaries and energetically continued to prosecute the war with these."⁴⁸ Greek city-states had a limited supply of citizen-soldiers and often had to employ mercenary soldiers to continue fighting extended conflicts.

Lechaeum (390)

At Corinth in 390, the Athenians had a crack light-infantry corps of mercenary soldiers known as peltasts – they did not wear the heavy armor of hoplites and fought at a distance using javelins. Xenophon writes that as Spartan hoplites were returning to their post at Lechaeum, two Athenian generals in Corinth – Callias and Iphicrates –

could see that there were not many Spartans and they were unaccompanied by peltasts or cavalry. So they thought it was safe to attack them with their peltast unit, and if the Spartans should march by the road, their peltasts would be able to strike them with their javelins on the Spartans' unprotected side and thus destroy them. Even if the Spartans

should try to pursue the peltasts, they would easily escape because peltasts are much more lightweight than hoplites.⁴⁹

According to Diodorus, the peltasts destroyed the Spartan regiment, almost completely wiping it out.⁵⁰ Xenophon says that the peltasts killed some two hundred and fifty hoplites out of a total force of six hundred.⁵¹ This would still have been devastating to the Spartans who had already shown signs of a dire manpower shortage in the Peloponnesian War by freeing helots who fought in the army.⁵² The Athenian victory at Lechaem demonstrated the effectiveness of light-armed troops against hoplites, and pointed to fundamental shifts in Greek warfare.

A significant political event also took place in the same year as the battle of Lechaem. In this year Corinth and Argos became united politically.⁵³ Under the strain of war, anti-Spartan factions in both cities had been working to unify their cities in order to strengthen the war effort against Sparta. Xenophon says Corinthian oligarchs

saw that their own land was being ravaged and they were dying because the enemy was near, while the rest of the allies were at peace and were able to work their land. As a result, the greatest and the best of the Corinthians desired peace; and after organizing, they began advocating these things to one another.⁵⁴

This provoked a strong reaction from the anti-Spartan faction, which attacked and drove the pro-Spartan oligarchs from Corinth. Xenophon goes on to claim that the plot against the pro-Spartan Corinthians was engineered by Argives, Athenians, Boeotians, and Corinthians who had taken bribes from the Persian king.⁵⁵ Many Corinthian exiles joined the Spartan side and fought against their fellow citizens during the war. Others were persuaded to return to Corinth, but Xenophon asserts,

They saw those in power ruling as tyrants, and they felt their city was disappearing because boundary stones were pulled up and their fatherland was called Argos instead of Corinth. They were forced to share in the constitution at Argos, which they did not want at all. And they had less power in the city than foreign residents, which some believed was an intolerable life.⁵⁶

Xenophon certainly exaggerates the situation – foreign residents never had a political voice in Greek cities, although some could become wealthy.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Xenophon's account provides insight into the mentality of the Corinthian oligarchs who would have had less influence when anti-Spartans

were in power.

King's Peace (386)

As in earlier periods, factional strife played a central role in the Corinthian War. Because Sparta was the dominant power at the time, the major political division in most Greek cities revolved around anti- and pro-Spartan factions. One of the key sources of civil unrest had to do with the Spartans continually infringing on the autonomy of Greek cities.⁵⁸ During the Peloponnesian War, the Spartans had claimed they fought against the Athenians to free the Greeks; but as it turned out, they were just as oppressive as the Athenians once they became the leaders in Greece. In fact, in the peace negotiations that ended the Corinthian War the Spartans agreed to hand over the Greek cities in Anatolia to the Persian king in exchange for the Persians switching their support to Sparta. The Persian king Artaxerxes II was largely responsible for the peace treaty so it is often called the King's Peace, but Xenophon calls it the Peace of Antalcidas after the Spartan general who helped secure the agreement. With the combined strength of the Persian Empire and Sparta, all Greek states were forced to accept the terms. The Thebans initially demanded to swear on behalf of all Boeotians but eventually relented because the Spartan king Agesilaus threatened to invade their territory if they did not allow the Boeotian cities to be autonomous. In fact, the most important stipulation in the peace agreement was that all cities on the Greek mainland were to be free and autonomous, which meant that Thebes had to disband its Boeotian federation and Argos and Corinth had to dissolve their political union. As a result, Sparta now firmly secured its hegemony in Greece.⁵⁹

Spartan occupation of the Cadmea (382–379)

The Spartans, however, did not hesitate to break the terms of the King's Peace when it suited their immediate goal of maintaining their leading position in Greece. In 382 – just four years after the King's Peace – the Spartans directly violated the autonomy clause by sending troops into the city of Thebes and occupying its sacred acropolis, the Cadmea. This continued the earlier Spartan practice of installing garrison troops and military governors in Greek cities. At the time, Xenophon says, “The Thebans were divided into political factions, and their polemarchs happened to be Ismenias and Leontiades, who were adversaries and were each a leader of one of the factions.”⁶⁰ *Polemarchs* (“leaders in war”) were leading magistrates at the local level and were the most important officials when the Boeotian federation was disbanded. Ismenias was the leader of the anti-Spartan faction, and Leontiades led the pro-Spartan

faction. When a Spartan army was passing through Theban territory on its way to northern Greece, Leontiades came out to meet the Spartan commander Phoebidas. Leontiades convinced Phoebidas to bring his troops into Thebes, which would intimidate the populace and secure power for his pro-Spartan faction. After Leontiades led Phoebidas and the Spartan troops to the acropolis, he proceeded to a council meeting. Then, according to Xenophon, he made the following declaration:

Gentlemen, do not at all be disheartened that the Spartans have control of the acropolis because they say they have come as enemies to no one except whoever desires war. Now it is allowed, and the law commands, that the polemarch arrest anyone who appears to be doing things worthy of the death penalty. Therefore, I arrest this man here, Ismenias, for inciting war.⁶¹

Ismenias was put on trial in Thebes with the Spartans sending out three of their own judges and one from each of their allies to pass judgment on the Theban statesman.⁶² The charges leveled against Ismenias were actually common actions of many leaders in Sparta and other Greek cities during the Classical Age. It was alleged “that he sided with the barbarian, had become a guest-friend to the Persian for harming Greece, and had received money from the Persian king.” Xenophon then adds “that he and Androcleidas [another anti-Spartan leader in Thebes] were most responsible for all the disorder in Greece.”⁶³ The show-trial ended with the execution of Ismenias, but the Thebans would eventually exact revenge for the Spartan interference in their internal affairs.

During the Spartan occupation of the Cadmea, Leontiades and other pro-Spartan leaders held traditional political offices and anti-Spartan leaders either went into exile or were quiescent. The arrest of Ismenias had compelled as many as three hundred Thebans to flee the city.⁶⁴ Many Thebans took up residence in Athens where they probably gained greater insight into the dynamism of Athens’s democratic assemblies and law courts. Other Thebans chose to continue living in the occupied city of Thebes. Epaminondas – the Theban who would become the city’s most famous general and statesman – remained in Thebes; and if we can believe Plutarch he constantly encouraged young Thebans to compete with the Spartans in wrestling matches. When the Thebans would defeat their Spartan opponents and were overly excited with victory, Epaminondas reportedly would chastise the Thebans for continuing to be slaves to the Spartans, whom they far excelled in physical strength and ability.⁶⁵



Figure 5.3 Modern Thebes looking south

For three years the Spartan garrison ensured the suppression of anti-Spartan leaders in Thebes. But then in the winter of 379/8 a handful of exiles secretly returned to the city and helped lead a revolt against the Spartan occupation.⁶⁶ Even the strongly anti-Theban writer Xenophon felt that the Spartans were unjustified in maintaining a garrison in Thebes:

Someone could certainly recount many things in both Greek and barbarian affairs that show how the gods do not overlook those committing sacrilege and doing unholy things. However that may be, I will speak about the things that lie before me. For after the Spartans swore to leave the cities autonomous and occupied the acropolis in Thebes, they were punished by those men alone whom they had wronged, and before this the Spartans had never been conquered by anyone. It took only seven exiles to bring down the reign of the pro-Spartan leaders who had brought the Spartans into the acropolis, wanting the Spartans to enslave the city so that they could become tyrants.⁶⁷

Once inside the city the anti-Spartan exiles planned to murder the leaders of the pro-Spartan faction – particularly Leontiades and the current polemarchs.⁶⁸ The polemarchs were celebrating a festival in honor of Aphrodite that marked the end of their year in office.⁶⁹ The anti-Spartan exiles had enlisted the help of the polemarchs' secretary, a man name Phillidas, who had told the polemarchs that "he would bring them the most revered and beautiful women in Thebes."⁷⁰

After Phillidas helped to get the polemarchs drunk, he brought in the anti-Spartan exiles disguised as women, and as soon as the exiles sat down they threw off their disguises and murdered the polemarchs. Then some of the exiles went to the house of Leontiades – the man most responsible for the Spartan occupation – and murdered him in front of his wife.⁷¹

After the exiles assassinated the pro-Spartan leaders, they set about arming the population. They provided weapons and armor to those who did not have their own, and they called on all hoplites and cavalymen to join in the fight to drive the Spartan garrison from the Cadmea. According to Xenophon, “While it was night, the citizens were in doubt and kept quiet. But when it was day and it was clear what had happened, then the hoplites and cavalymen quickly marched out to help fully armed.”⁷² The Thebans then began the assault on the acropolis. In continuing his description of these events, Xenophon states,

When the men on the acropolis realized there were few of them and saw the zeal of all their attackers – great rewards were announced for those who first made the ascent – they were terrified and said they would leave if they were granted safe passage with their arms. The Thebans gladly granted what they asked. After declaring a truce and swearing oaths, they sent the Spartans away on the stated terms. But as the Spartans were leaving, the Thebans seized all those they recognized as their enemies and murdered them. Some of them, however, were carried off and saved by the Athenians who had come to help from the border. Nevertheless, the Thebans seized all the children of the men they had murdered and cut their throats.⁷³

With the assassination of the pro-Spartan leaders and expulsion of the Spartan garrison, the Thebans became free and autonomous again. The brutal purge of the pro-Spartans’ children demonstrated the horrible consequences of factional strife in a Greek city.

Boeotian War (378–371)

As soon as the Spartans received word their garrison had been expelled, they declared war on Thebes. They also executed one – possibly two – of the Spartan garrison commanders who had surrendered to the Thebans.⁷⁴ The Spartans then took the added step of sending out an expeditionary force in winter – military campaigns generally were not conducted in winter because inclement weather posed serious dangers to land and sea forces.⁷⁵ As the Spartan army advanced over the summit of Mount Cithaeron on the Boeotian border, a forward unit of light-armed peltasts encountered a small contingent

of armed Thebans guarding the pass. Xenophon recounts that the contingent consisted of about one hundred and fifty Thebans who had been prisoners during the Spartan occupation of Thebes. In his account of the liberation of Thebes, Xenophon relates that the leading exiles had armed these prisoners with weapons taken from public buildings.⁷⁶ As it turned out, the peltasts in the Spartan army wiped out the small Theban contingent almost to the man, after which the Spartan army freely continued on to the Boeotian city of Plataea.⁷⁷ Although the Spartans had helped destroy Plataea in 427, they probably helped rebuild the city after the King's Peace in order to have a base of operations to attack Thebes if and when the Thebans attempted to reassert their power in Boeotia and beyond. The Spartans then made their way to Thespieae and installed a military governor there, leaving behind troops and money to hire mercenaries for the war against Thebes.⁷⁸

For several years the Spartans conducted annual invasions into Theban territory. And with garrisons in the cities of Tanagra, Plataea, and Thespieae, the Spartans were able to maintain a constant presence in Boeotia and launch numerous raids to wreak havoc on the Theban state.⁷⁹ On one such raid, however, the Thebans got the best of their enemy and killed the Spartan commander Phoebidas who had been responsible for capturing the Cadmea in 382 but at the time was garrison commander of Thespieae. The Thebans then chased Phoebidas's forces all the way back to the walls of Thespieae.⁸⁰ Xenophon relates that "from this action, Theban affairs were ignited again and they marched against Thespieae and other surrounding cities. Nevertheless, the people from these cities left and went to Thebes because oligarchic regimes had been set up in all of these cities, just as had happened earlier in Thebes."⁸¹ Despite Sparta's professed opposition to tyranny, it frequently supported pro-Spartan oligarchs who ruled as virtual tyrants – the two best examples were the Thirty Tyrants at Athens and the reign of the Theban polemarchs during the Spartan occupation of the Cadmea.⁸² Spartan garrison troops and military governors could ensure the subjugation of a population for a time, but frequently it galvanized a population and helped to ignite armed insurrection. Following the liberation of the Cadmea, the Thebans instituted a full-fledged democracy and abandoned oligarchy, the latter of which undoubtedly became associated with Spartan oppression.⁸³



Figure 5.4 Wide view of Mount Cithaeron with Plataea at its base looking south

One of the most significant developments in Greece after the liberation of Thebes and the establishment of its democracy was the resurrection of an Athenian alliance system known as the Second Athenian League. Xenophon characteristically omits any direct mention of the Second Athenian League. But from some of his indirect references – as well as inscriptional evidence and late sources – it is clear that Athens created a new alliance system that supposedly would not allow it to repeat the earlier abuses in the Delian League.⁸⁴ Athens also repeatedly sent troops into Boeotia to help the Thebans defend their land against Spartan attacks.⁸⁵ In 375, the Athenians even launched a raid on Peloponnesian territory that kept the Spartans from invading Theban territory. According to Xenophon, it was at this point that “the Thebans very confidently marched against their neighboring cities and took control of them once more.”⁸⁶ This probably meant the Thebans captured and installed pro-Theban leaders in cities such as Tanagra, Thespieae, and Plataea.

Battle of Tegyra (375)

In another glaring omission, Xenophon fails to mention the crucial battle of Tegyra in the same year that Thebes regained control of Boeotia.⁸⁷ In this battle – although significantly outnumbered – the Thebans single-handedly defeated Spartan troops on the northern shore of Lake Copais. According to

Plutarch, the Theban general Pelopidas used an initial cavalry charge followed by a closely arrayed infantry unit of three hundred hoplites to decisively defeat the Spartans who may have had as many as nine hundred men.⁸⁸ Diodorus says there were five hundred elite Theban warriors at this battle, which probably included the cavalry force; the Spartan force was double this number.⁸⁹ Both authors claim the battle greatly raised the spirits of the Thebans and increased their reputation among the Greeks.⁹⁰

The battle of Tegyra also was one of the first major victories for the Theban military unit known as the Sacred Band. According to Plutarch, this elite contingent consisted of three hundred soldiers who were supported by the state and stationed on the Cadmea. Plutarch also claims that the Sacred Band consisted of homosexual partners.⁹¹ Ancient authors and material culture reveal that there was a general acknowledgment and acceptance of homosexual relationships in ancient Greece – as long as these relationships were conducted according to certain socially accepted norms. Xenophon, however, implies that the Boeotians went beyond what was acceptable. In his fourth-century treatise on the Spartan constitution, he says, “Boeotian men and boys join together as couples.”⁹² Xenophon uses this statement to contrast it with Spartan practice, which he asserts involved no physical contact between men and boys. In a defensive and idealistic passage, he says the Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus prescribed that

if an honorable man admired the spirit of a boy and tried to become an innocent friend and spend time with him, he approved and thought this was an excellent form of education. If, however, a man was clearly physically attracted to a boy, he established this as shameful and made lovers abstain from boys no less than parents abstain from sex with their children and siblings with each other. I am not surprised that some disbelieve this because the laws of many cities do not oppose the sexual desire for boys.⁹³

Clearly Xenophon was trying to distance the Spartans from a common practice, but Sparta may have actually been at the forefront of institutionalized pederasty in ancient Greece.⁹⁴ Members of the Theban Sacred Band probably had homosexual relationships, but the most important factor in their success was that they were a professional military unit supported at public expense. With their victory at Tegyra, the Theban Sacred Band proved to be a match for the famed warriors of Sparta.⁹⁵

Common Peace (375)

Sometime after the Thebans defeated the Spartans at Tegyra, they invaded the

neighboring territory of Phocis.⁹⁶ A similar action had brought about the Corinthian War, and now the Thebans demonstrated their growing confidence by venturing beyond their borders. However, Xenophon writes,

While the Spartans and their allies were assembling in Phocis, the Thebans returned to their own country and guarded their borders. The Athenians for their part saw that the Thebans were increasing in power because of them and were not contributing to their fleet; in addition, they were worn out by taxes, plundering raids from Aegina, and guarding their territory. As a result, the Athenians were eager to end the war, and so they sent ambassadors to Sparta and concluded a peace agreement.⁹⁷

Diodorus provides a different perspective on what became the Common Peace of 375. He says that the Persian king Artaxerxes II was planning to campaign against Egypt and wanted to put an end to the constant fighting in Greece so that he could recruit Greek mercenaries: “Therefore, he sent ambassadors to Greece calling for the cities to conclude a Common Peace. The Greeks gladly accepted his proposals because they were tired of the continual wars and agreed to the peace that stipulated all cities should be autonomous and ungarrisoned.”⁹⁸ Diodorus’s account points to the important role the Persian king played once again in Greek affairs and shows how Xenophon frequently downplays or omits this fact.

The Common Peace forced the Thebans to allow the Boeotian cities to be autonomous, but it also stipulated that Sparta could not maintain garrisons in any city.⁹⁹ Soon, however, the major Greek states were at war again, and the Thebans used the opportunity to impose their will on the Boeotian cities. By 371, Xenophon says the Athenians were especially concerned about developments in Boeotia:

They saw that their friends the Plataeans had been driven out of Boeotia and were fleeing to them, and the Thespians were beseeching them not to allow them to be left without a city. As a result, the Athenians no longer agreed with the Thebans, but they were ashamed to wage war against them, and they calculated that it would be inconvenient. Nevertheless, they were no longer willing to take part in what they were doing, especially when they saw the Thebans marching against the Phocians who were ancient friends of the Athenians, and they were destroying cities that had been trusted allies in the Persian Wars and were friends of the Athenians.¹⁰⁰

The Persian king Artaxerxes II again seems to have played a pivotal role in this Common Peace, but it is not readily apparent in Xenophon’s account.¹⁰¹ For

Xenophon, the Spartan king Agesilaus was the most important figure in the peace negotiations. The main terms of the peace agreement were “to withdraw the military governors from the cities, to disband infantry and naval forces, and to allow the cities to be autonomous.”¹⁰² However, in clear contradiction to the autonomy clause, “The Spartans swore on behalf of themselves and their allies.”¹⁰³ The Athenians and Thebans only swore on behalf of their own cities, which was in line with the autonomy clause. Nevertheless, on the following day the Theban ambassadors asked to alter the treaty to say that the Boeotians swore to the treaty rather than just the Thebans. According to Xenophon, the Spartan king Agesilaus resolutely refused to make any changes to the treaty and said he would be glad to remove the Thebans from the peace agreement.¹⁰⁴ Plutarch records that Epaminondas was the leading Theban ambassador at the conference, and he got in an argument with Agesilaus over the autonomy of cities in Boeotia and Laconia. After Epaminondas had given an impassioned and persuasive speech about justice and equality, Agesilaus asked if it was just for the Thebans to swear on behalf of all Boeotians, thereby infringing on their autonomy. In response, Epaminondas asked Agesilaus the same question regarding the cities in Laconia. Agesilaus then became angry and removed the name of the Thebans from the peace treaty, after which the Spartans declared war on Thebes.¹⁰⁵

Leuctra (371)

Epaminondas and other anti-Spartan leaders in Thebes apparently were now confident enough to face the Spartans in battle without the aid of allies. They expected the Spartans to invade Boeotia and they prepared accordingly. The Spartan king Cleombrotus was already at the head of an army stationed in Phocis and was ordered to march against Thebes unless the Thebans allowed the Boeotian cities to be autonomous. According to Diodorus, when Spartan envoys arrived in Thebes in a last ditch effort to avoid war, “The Thebans defended themselves by saying that they had never interfered with affairs in Laconia, and so the Spartans should not concern themselves with affairs in Boeotia.”¹⁰⁶

Eventually the Theban and Spartan armies came face to face in the heart of Boeotian territory. The Spartan king Cleombrotus invaded from Phocis via an unexpected route, eventually arriving at Leuctra in the territory of Thespieae.¹⁰⁷ When the Thebans found out where Cleombrotus and his army were, they marched to Leuctra and encamped on a nearby hill opposite the invading army. The Thebans had no allies except the Boeotians.¹⁰⁸ Diodorus says, “Epaminondas called up for battle all Thebans of military age and those willing and able of the other Boeotians. He then marched the force from Thebes

having no more than six thousand altogether.”¹⁰⁹ Diodorus’s total for the Thebans and their Boeotian allies probably only included hoplite and cavalry forces. There may have been a significant amount of light-armed soldiers at the battle, but these lower-class troops rarely get mentioned in ancient accounts of hoplite battles.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the Thebans and their Boeotian allies were probably greatly outnumbered because the Spartans had allied troops from all over Greece. Plutarch claims the Spartans had ten thousand hoplites and one thousand cavalry, which seems to have been the normal size of a Spartan-led army.¹¹¹ Xenophon continues his account of Leuctra by saying,



Figure 5.5 Battlefield of Leuctra from the location of the Spartan camp looking northwest with Theban victory monument at the right

The Theban leaders concluded that if they did not fight a battle, their Boeotian allies would desert them and they would be besieged. In addition, if the Theban people did not have provisions, the city would turn against them. So, since many of them had already been in exile, they thought that it was better to die fighting rather than go into exile again.¹¹²

Xenophon points to a pressing reality – the anti-Spartan leaders in Thebes had to confront the Spartans in battle if they wanted to maintain control of their city and the region of Boeotia.

So in the summer of 371 the Thebans decided to risk everything on a pitched battle against the Spartans. Xenophon states that before the battle military forces in the Spartan army drove Boeotian non-combatants and those unwilling to fight back into the Boeotian camp and “made the Boeotian army

much bigger and more crowded.”¹¹³ Then he goes on to say, “The Thebans formed up in a compact body not less than fifty shields deep, believing that if they defeated the section around the Spartan king, it would be easy to handle all the rest.”¹¹⁴ The Spartan king Cleombrotus probably expected Epaminondas and the Thebans to take up a position on their respective right wing, but apparently Epaminondas took the innovative approach of arraying on the left wing directly opposite the Spartans. As leaders of the Boeotian army the Thebans should have been stationed on their right wing, but they lined up on the left wing in excessively deep formation to crush the elite soldiers of Sparta.

The battle began with cavalry forces engaging in an initial skirmish in front of the two armies. Xenophon contends that the cavalry on the Spartan side was far inferior to the Theban cavalry, the latter of which had recently gained a lot of experience in campaigns against Orchomenus and Thespieae.¹¹⁵ Xenophon explains that only the wealthiest men raised horses in Sparta, but they did not actually serve – the cavalymen who did serve lacked long familiarity with their mounts or weapons and were selected at the last minute before riding out on campaign. He then says, “The soldiers on the horses were in the worst physical shape and were the least ambitious.”¹¹⁶ Not surprisingly, the Theban cavalry routed the Spartan cavalry forces and drove them back onto the advancing regiments of the heavily armed hoplites, causing considerable disruptions. Added to this, the Theban Sacred Band followed close behind their cavalry and smashed head-on with the Spartans. For a while the battle apparently hung in the balance, but eventually the sheer weight of the stacked Theban units proved decisive. The Spartan king Cleombrotus was killed along with other high-ranking Spartan officers. In all, almost a thousand men lost their lives on the Spartan side, which included some four hundred elite Spartan troops.¹¹⁷ According to Pausanias, the Thebans only lost forty-seven men.¹¹⁸ This seems incredible, but when victorious hoplite units maintained their order they rarely sustained significant losses. The battle of Leuctra decisively ended the Spartan Hegemony and immediately changed the balance of power in Greece. Sometime after the battle the Thebans erected one of the first permanent battlefield trophies.¹¹⁹ The modern reconstruction helps to emphasize how important the battle was for Theban history, ushering in a new period in which Thebes would now play the leading role in Greek affairs.



Figure 5.6 Theban victory monument at Leuctra looking west

Notes

- 1 Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.5; Plut. *Lys.* 27.2–4.
- 2 Diod. 14.86.6.
- 3 Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.5.
- 4 Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.3–4; Plut. *Ages.* 6.6–11; Paus. 3.9.3–4. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.3, 5.1.33, 7.1.34. Agesilaus was emulating the legendary king Agamemnon who had gathered his forces at Aulis before setting sail for Troy. The gods would not send favorable winds, so Agamemnon took the infamous step of sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia to ensure that his fleet could sail. This would later lead to his wife Clytemnestra murdering him when he returned to Greece after the Trojan War: Aesch. *Ag.* Cf. Eur. *IA*, *IT*; Apollod. *Epit.* 3.21–22.
- 5 Xenophon is our main source for the Spartan Hegemony and had close ties with Agesilaus and Sparta, but at least on one occasion he is critical of the aggressive foreign policy during the Spartan Hegemony: Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.1.
- 6 Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.2, 4.8.1, 4.8.29, 4.8.39. For discussion and earlier bibliography, see Krentz 1995, 183.
- 7 Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.1–2; *Hell. Oxy.* 21.1.
- 8 There are discrepancies between Xenophon and the Oxyrhynchus historian about how Thebes became involved with the dispute between Phocis and Locris: Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.3–4; *Hell. Oxy.* 21.2–5. Cf. Diod. 14.82.
- 9 *Hell. Oxy.* 20.1.
- 10 *Hell. Oxy.* 21.1.
- 11 *Hell. Oxy.* 20.1.
- 12 *Hell. Oxy.* 19.2.
- 13 Bruce 1967, 103–104, 158; Larsen 1968, 33–34; Cartledge 2000, 403–404; Beck and Ganter 2015, 144 n. 41. Cf. Meiggs and Lewis 1988, no. 14; Fornara 1983, no. 44. A late source named Julius Pollux is often cited for the claim that forty-five measures of produce was the minimum property qualification in Orchomenus. However, the passage in question is actually talking about different types of containers and names for them, not property qualifications. It reads,

When Aristophanes in the *Acharnians* speaks of measures of gold, the vessel [is] probably Persian: some think this is what the festal chest is called, in Aristotle's *Orchomenian Constitution* there is an Orchomenian measure containing forty-five Attic measures. Some of those going to Pytho, regarding the boxes, sometimes also call the little cauldrons *panagridas*.

(Poll. *Onom.* 10.164–165)

This passage is not evidence for a property qualification in Orchomenus. Another problematic piece of evidence is often adduced to claim two hundred measures of produce was the minimum qualification for an Athenian hoplite. In a treatise entitled the *Athenian Constitution* ascribed to Aristotle but probably written by one of his students, it is stated that “the *zeugitai* class comprised those whose produce amounted to two hundred measures, wet and dry combined” (*Ath. Pol.* 7.4). The *zeugitai*, which literally means “yokemen,” are generally but not securely equated with hoplites because of the way hoplites were arrayed in close order in the phalanx. For a good discussion of the vexed problem concerning Athenian political classifications, see Ste. Croix 2004, 5–72.

- 14 *Hell. Oxy.* 19.4. Cf. *Xen. Hell.* 2.3.48, 5.4.9.
- 15 Cf. *Thuc.* 4.93.3, 5.57.2.
- 16 *Hell. Oxy.* 19.4.
- 17 *Thuc.* 8.65.3, 8.67.3, 8.69.4; *Arist. Pol.* 1294a 37–41, 1317b 30–41; *Ath. Pol.* 30.2. Cf. *Ath. Pol.* 29.5. However, it should be noted that scholars are divided on the issue. For earlier bibliography, see McKechnie and Kern 1988, 159–160. Since the Boeotian councils were divided into four groups, councilors may have only had to serve full-time for a quarter of the year, which would have made their service less burdensome: Bruce 1967, 108; Moore [1983] 2010, 131–132.
- 18 *Hell. Oxy.* 19.4.
- 19 *Hell. Oxy.* 19.3. See Map 4 Boeotian districts, cities, and towns.
- 20 Cf. *Thuc.* 4.93.3, 5.57.2.
- 21 See Map 3 Battle sites in central Greece.
- 22 *Xen. Hell.* 3.5.6.
- 23 *Xen. Hell.* 3.5.18.
- 24 *Xen. Hell.* 3.5.19.
- 25 *Xen. Hell.* 3.5.20.
- 26 *Xen. Hell.* 3.5.23.
- 27 Cf. *Thuc.* 4.97–101.
- 28 *Xen. Hell.* 3.5.24–25.
- 29 *Xen. Hell.* 4.2.17. Cf. *Xen. Hell.* 3.5.6.
- 30 *Xen. Hell.* 4.2.18.
- 31 For further examples, see *Xen. Hell.* 3.5.13, 3.5.21–22, 7.1.33, 7.1.41, 7.5.9, 7.5.12, 7.5.18. Cf. *Xen. Hell.* 7.5.8, 7.5.19.
- 32 *Xen. Hell.* 4.2.18.
- 33 Cf. *Thuc.* 4.93.4.
- 34 Cf. *Thuc.* 5.71.1.
- 35 *Xen. Hell.* 4.2.21–23. Cf. *Xen. Hell.* 4.3.1. Diodorus (14.83.2) says the Boeotians and their allies lost twenty-eight hundred soldiers and the

Spartans and their allies lost eleven hundred. For battlefield trophies in ancient Greece, see van Wees 2004, 136–138.

36 Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.8; Diod. 14.83.3.

37 Xenophon (*Hell.* 4.3.10) mentions a partial eclipse of the sun that dates the event to August 14, 394.

38 See Map 3 Battle sites in central Greece.

39 Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.17.

40 Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.19.

41 Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.20–21.

42 See Map 2 Battle sites.

43 Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.10–14.

44 Xen. *Hell.* 4.7.2, 4.8.1, 4.8.9.

45 Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9, 4.4.12. Cf. Hornblower 1991–2008, 1.167.

46 Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.1. See Map 1 Regions and cities.

47 Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.7–12, 4.4.17. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.19.

48 Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.14.

49 Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.13. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9.

50 Diod. 14.91.2

51 Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.12, 4.5.17. Cf. Underhill [1906] 1979, 147.

52 Thuc. 5.34.1, 5.67.1, 7.19.3, 7.58.3, 8.5.1. For discussion of Sparta's manpower shortage, see Cartledge 2002, 263–272.

53 Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.1.

54 Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.1.

55 Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.2.

56 Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.6.

57 Cf. [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1.10–12.

58 E.g., Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.2, 2.4.28–29, 3.1.3–4, 3.1.9, 3.2.20, 3.2.29, 3.5.12–13, 4.2.5.

59 Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.14–15, 5.1.25–36; Diod. 14.110.1–4.

60 Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.25.

61 Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.30. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.51.

62 Cf. Thuc. 3.52.3–4, 3.68.1.

63 Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.35. For the role played by Ismenias and Androcleidas in inciting the Corinthian War, see Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.1–4; *Hell. Oxy.* 20.1–2, 21.1–5.

64 Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.31.

65 Plut. *Pel.* 7.3.

66 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.1–12; Diod. 15.25–27.3; Plut. *Pel.* 8–13. There are multiple sources for the liberation of Thebes. Xenophon's description is the only contemporary account, but his strong bias against Thebes and omissions require looking to later sources for additional information. Scholars have often remarked that Xenophon completely omits the participation of

Pelopidas, the other leading statesman closely associated with Thebes's hegemony in Greece following the battle of Leuctra in 371.

67 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.1.

68 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.2, 5.4.7, 7.3.7.

69 For discussion of the Aphrodisia, see Schachter 1981–1994, 1.38–40.

70 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.4.

71 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.5–7.

72 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.9.

73 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.11–12. Cf. Diod. 15.25–26; Din. 1.39.

74 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.13; Diod. 15.27.3; Plut. *Pel.* 13.2.

75 Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.17–18.

76 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.8. Cf. Plut. *Pel.* 12.1.

77 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.14.

78 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.15.

79 See Map 4 Boeotian districts, cities, and towns.

80 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.41–45. The Spartans had just recently rebuilt the walls of Thespieae.

81 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.46. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.25–36, 5.4.1–2; Arist. *Pol.* 1292b 5–10; Thuc. 3.62.

82 Cf. Hdt. 5.92.a.1–2.

83 IG 7.2407, 7.2408, 7.2858; SEG 34.355; Polyb. 6.44.9, 8.35.6, cf. 6.43.4–7; Diod. 15.78.4–15.79.1, 15.79.5, 16.25.1; Paus. 9.14.7; Arr. *Anab.* 1.7.2; Larsen 1968, 175–180; Buckler 1980, 15–45; Buck 1994, 78–80, 106–110; Hanson 1999, 28. *Contra* Rhodes 2017. I would like to thank P. J. Rhodes for sharing prior to publication his work, in which he argues against the generally accepted view that after 379 Thebes was democratic. However, the weight of the combined inscriptional and literary evidence to my mind still supports the traditional view that there was a Theban democracy after 379.

84 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.34, 5.4.64, 6.1.12, 6.3.19, 6.5.2, 7.1.36; Rhodes and Osborne 2003, no. 22; Diod. 15.28–30.

85 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.9–12, 5.4.14, 5.4.34, 5.4.54, 5.4.59; Diod. 15.32.2–6, 15.33.4; Nepos *Chabrias* 1; Polyaeus 2.1.2.

86 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.63.

87 See Map 3 Battle sites in central Greece.

88 Plut. *Pel.* 17.2.

89 Diod. 15.37.1.

90 Diod. 15.37.2; Plut. *Pel.* 17.5–6.

91 Plut. *Pel.* 18.2. Cf. DeVoto 1992; Ogden 1996; Davidson 2007, esp. 255–390.

92 Xen. *Lac. Pol.* 2.12.

93 Xen. *Lac. Pol.* 2.13–14.

- 94 Scanlon 2005. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.24–33.
- 95 Plut. *Pel.* 19.3–4.
- 96 Xen. *Hell.* 6.1.1.
- 97 Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.1.
- 98 Diod. 15.38.1–2. Diodorus (15.38.3) goes on to say incorrectly that the Thebans refused to accept the peace and were excluded, which is a mistaken conflation with the later Common Peace that led to the battle of Leuctra in 371. For discussion and bibliography, see Stylianou 1998, 321–326.
- 99 Cf. Isoc. 14.5, 8.16.
- 100 Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.1. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.5. Diodorus (15.46.4–6) says before the Thebans destroyed Plataea and Thespieae, the Plataeans had been planning to hand their city over to the Athenians, and the Thespians had been on friendly terms with Athens.
- 101 Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.12. Cf. Diod. 15.50.4; Dion. Hal. *Lys.* 12.
- 102 Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.18.
- 103 Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.19.
- 104 Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.19.
- 105 Plut. *Ages.* 27.3–28.2. Cf. Diod. 15.38.3.
- 106 Diod. 15.51.4.
- 107 See Map 3 Battles sites in central Greece.
- 108 Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.3–4.
- 109 Diod. 15.52.2.
- 110 Cf. Thuc. 6.69.2.
- 111 Plut. *Pel.* 20.1. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.20.
- 112 Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.6.
- 113 Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.9.
- 114 Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.12. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.40.
- 115 Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.10.
- 116 Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.11.
- 117 Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.13–15; Plut. *Pel.* 23; Plut. *Ages.* 28.5–6. Cf. Diod. 15.56.4.
- 118 Paus. 9.13.12. Xenophon does not mention Theban or Boeotian casualties.
- 119 For discussion and earlier bibliography, see Stroszeck 2004. The Thebans apparently defied tradition by setting up a permanent battlefield trophy: Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 2.23(69–70); Diod. 13.24.5–6; Plut. *Mor.* 273C–D.

6 Classical Thebes (371–323 BCE)

After the resounding military victory at Leuctra in 371, Thebes became the new hegemonic power in Greece and soon launched an invasion into the Spartan homeland of Laconia.¹ This action was unheard of in the Greek world. According to tradition, Sparta and its immediate vicinity had been free from invasion for five hundred years.² More important, however, the Thebans used the historic military campaign to liberate the neighboring region of Messenia from Spartan control. In one swift stroke, half of Sparta's territory was gone. Messenian helots were now their own masters and would forever be a hostile state bordering Spartan territory. Also sometime after Leuctra, the major walled city of Megalopolis was built in Arcadia, which served as another check on any attempt by Sparta to regain dominance in the Peloponnesus.

Throughout the 360s, Thebes conducted repeated invasions into both the Peloponnesus and Thessaly. This period is traditionally known as the Theban Hegemony (371–362) because of Thebes's leading role in Greek affairs. But Thebes continued to play a dominant role in Greece after this period as well, engaging in multiple conflicts in the ensuing decades. The most detrimental for Thebes was the Third Sacred War (356–346), a war the Thebans initiated with their neighbors the Phocians. The Thebans brought a charge of sacrilege against the Phocians, who in turn seized control of Delphi with the support of Athens and Sparta. The Phocians were able to maintain large standing armies of mercenaries by pillaging the sacred dedications and treasuries at Delphi. Thebes fought a war of attrition with the Phocians, but eventually had to call in Philip II of Macedonia to end the fighting.

The Third Sacred War did not spell the end of Thebes's political and military power. But it was soon evident that Philip intended to subjugate Greece. Therefore, Thebes and Athens – the two remaining major powers in Greece – formed an alliance to confront Philip's army. Eventually, the two sides engaged in a fierce battle at Chaeronea in 338. The Thebans held the right wing, which was reserved for the leading power in a Greek army. In fact, the Athenians had ceded leadership to the Thebans, not only because the battle took place in

Boeotian territory but also because the Thebans provided the last real hope for defeating Philip and his Macedonian army. As it turned out though, the Greeks were soundly defeated at Chaeronea. Philip had created a new type of battle-hardened infantryman with lighter armor and a long pike – the latter probably two to three times longer than the traditional hoplite spear.³ The battle of Chaeronea effectively ended Greek independence.



Figure 6.1 Grave stele commemorating the victory at Leuctra



Figure 6.2 Sanctuary of Delphi with the ruins of the temple of Apollo in the center

Following his victory at Chaeronea, Philip established the League of Corinth and installed garrisons at both Corinth and Thebes.⁴ When Philip was assassinated in 336, his son Alexander quickly secured his position in Macedonia and Greece. However, in the following year while Alexander was campaigning in the north, the Thebans revolted after a rumor spread that he had been killed in combat – the Thebans no doubt expected to drive out the Macedonian garrison as they had the Spartans in 379. Alexander quickly marched south. Appearing before the city with his army and the Macedonian garrison still encamped on the Cadmea, Alexander attempted to negotiate with the Thebans. They adamantly refused and decided to fight a pitched battle before the walls of their city. Alexander decisively defeated the Thebans and sacked the city. He reinstalled a garrison on the Cadmea and enslaved the population, razing the city but sparing the house of the famous poet Pindar.⁵

Theban Hegemony (371–362)

Thebes's hegemonic ambitions in Greece began with the victory at Leuctra.⁶ The Thebans quickly sent a garlanded messenger to Athens to announce their historic achievement, but the Athenians unceremoniously dismissed the herald from Athens. In fact, at some point after Leuctra the Athenians convened a peace conference to renew a Common Peace in Greece that guaranteed the

autonomy of all large and small cities.⁷ The Thebans could not agree to a peace treaty that would dissolve the Boeotian federation.



Figure 6.3 Lion monument at Chaeronea

First invasion of the Peloponnesus (370/69)

Initially the Thebans worked to consolidate their position in central Greece.⁸ But in the winter of 370/69, the Thebans took the unprecedented step of marching into Spartan territory. They had been asked to help anti-Spartan cities in the Peloponnesus. The states opposed to Sparta had first appealed to the Athenians who turned them down, so the Thebans took up the challenge to march into the Peloponnesus. Diodorus tells us that Epaminondas and Pelopidas were the leading boeotarchs on this expedition, and after more than fifty thousand allied soldiers were gathered together it was decided to march into Spartan territory.⁹ Other references to this allied army say that there were seventy thousand soldiers in the invasion force.¹⁰ The larger tally probably included defectors from the communities surrounding Sparta as well as runaway helots.¹¹ Members of the surrounding communities had always served in large numbers in the Spartan field army, but they did not have Spartan citizenship, which made them a potential source of opposition in Laconia.¹² Over the course of the Classical Age, freed helots also were deployed increasingly on Spartan military campaigns; but despite being emancipated, they probably never gained full Spartan citizenship.¹³

Xenophon claims the Thebans – even with their large allied army – were reluctant to invade Spartan territory and had to be convinced by their Peloponnesian allies to march into Laconia.¹⁴ Still, most likely it was not that difficult to convince the Thebans to invade Spartan territory because of the Spartans' repeated invasions of Boeotia. After ravaging a considerable amount of territory in Laconia, the Thebans actually marched on the city of Sparta itself. Although Sparta did not have a circuit wall and the number of full citizens had drastically decreased, the city still had many allies and was able to muster more than six thousand helots by promising them freedom.¹⁵ The Eurotas River – which flowed just east of Sparta – also provided a major barrier because it was at its fullest in the middle of winter.¹⁶ Xenophon only indirectly mentions that the Thebans and their allies attacked the city, but Diodorus provides a fairly extensive account of the fighting around Sparta. He says the Thebans and their allies encountered considerable difficulties crossing the Eurotas River and sustained a number of losses in various skirmishes around the city. Plutarch, however, claims that Epaminondas could not compel the Spartans to come out and fight a decisive pitched battle, adding that the Spartan king Agesilaus had stationed hoplites in strategic locations throughout the city.¹⁷ Whatever the specific details of the military actions around Sparta, the Thebans had struck another major blow to Spartan prestige in Greece. They had marched into the heart of Spartan territory and ravaged a land that according to legend had been inviolable for some five hundred years.¹⁸

Xenophon writes that after the Thebans left the vicinity of Sparta, “They burned unwall’d cities and for three days besieged Gythium, where the Spartans had their dockyards. Some of the soldiers from surrounding communities participated in the attacks and joined the expedition with the Theban allies.”¹⁹ This is how Xenophon ends his account of the Thebans’ first invasion into the Peloponnesus.

However, the Thebans were not done. After marching out of Laconia, they proceeded to liberate Messenia, which had been under direct Spartan control for hundreds of years despite being separated by the imposing mountain range of Mount Taygetus.²⁰ Diodorus describes in highly rhetorical fashion how this was accomplished:

Epaminondas, who was naturally ambitious and reached for eternal glory, advised the Arcadians and his other allies to resettle Messene. For many years it had been left in ruins by the Spartans, but it was a place well suited for attacks on Sparta. After they all came to an agreement, he searched for the surviving Messenians and enrolled other volunteers into the political organization. He refounded Messene and provided it with many inhabitants. Dividing up the land between them and undertaking rebuilding projects, he recovered a remarkable Greek city and received great approval from all people.²¹

Messene – on the western slopes of Mount Ithome – was fortified with an imposing circuit wall and served as a major check on Spartan attempts to regain control of Messenia. Many individuals from surrounding communities and helots who had aided the Thebans in their invasion of Laconia probably were settled at Messene.²² In one fell swoop the liberation of Messenia cut Sparta’s territory in half, which combined with its already depleted manpower base ensured that Sparta would never be the same.²³

However, following the successful completion of their first invasion into the Peloponnesus, both Epaminondas and Pelopidas were charged with capital offenses for retaining their commands beyond the legally stipulated time.²⁴ They were both acquitted, but it demonstrated that there was opposition to their policies. One of their most vocal opponents was a Theban named Menekleidas who had also played a part in the liberation of Thebes. John Buckler states,

Menekleidas may genuinely have been a man who preferred peace and security to hegemony. His attacks on the active policy of Epameinondas and Pelopidas may have stemmed from a sincere disagreement over the conduct of foreign affairs. Certainly he attacked their policy at its earliest

appearance and regularly resisted it thereafter.²⁵

Plutarch says Menecleidas later managed to keep Epaminondas from holding the office of boeotarch, probably in the year 368; but eventually Menecleidas lost a major lawsuit against Pelopidas and was so heavily fined that he tried to bring about a revolution in Thebes.²⁶ Plutarch does not specify when this later attempt at revolution occurred but it may have been in 364 when a group of exiles tried to change the Theban government into an aristocracy.²⁷

Second invasion of the Peloponnesus (369)

With all that Epaminondas and Pelopidas had accomplished for Thebes, it is not surprising that they were acquitted. In fact, both leaders must have been fully exonerated because they were again chosen to lead major military campaigns in 369 – Epaminondas led a second invasion into the Peloponnesus, and Pelopidas marched north into Thessaly and Macedonia.²⁸ Xenophon does not mention Epaminondas by name, but he remarks on how well the Thebans and their allies conducted a night raid at Mount Oneon as they forced a passage into the Peloponnesus for their second invasion:

They were not mistaken in their timing, but fell upon the Spartans and Pelleneians just when the night watches were ending and the rest were rising from their beds, wherever each one needed to go. It was at this point that the Thebans attacked and struck their opponents – they were prepared and in good order, their opponents unprepared and disorganized.²⁹

This most likely was not intended to be a compliment, however, because military actions at night ran counter to the traditional hoplite code of daylight pitched battles. Diodorus explicitly states that Epaminondas was one of the boeotarchs on this expedition and the Boeotians were able to field an army of seven thousand hoplites and six hundred cavalry.³⁰ Much of the fighting in this second invasion occurred around the city of Corinth, with the Thebans and their allies going so far as to attack the city. They sustained heavy casualties – which possibly included members of the Sacred Band – but the Thebans demonstrated their commitment to their new Peloponnesian allies.³¹

Nevertheless, not all of Thebes's allies were content with the new arrangement. Xenophon writes,

Up to this time, the Thebans and all those who had revolted from Sparta were in full agreement, managing their affairs and making expeditions under the leadership of the Thebans. But then a certain man from Mantinea named Lycomedes – second to none in birth and wealth and

especially ambitious – filled the Arcadians with pride. He told them that the Peloponnesus was the fatherland only to the Arcadians, since they were the only inhabitants who were autochthonous, and the Arcadians were the most numerous of the Greek peoples, and had the strongest physiques as well. He also proclaimed that they were the bravest people, citing as proof that whenever men needed mercenaries there was no group they chose other than Arcadians. In addition, he said the Spartans had never invaded Athenian territory without the Arcadians, and now the Thebans did not attack Spartan territory without them.³²

By this time the Arcadians had formed their own federal state governed by magistrates, a council, and an assembly with ten thousand members who were probably of hoplite status; there was also a standing army with a core of five thousand professional soldiers paid by the state.³³ Following the second Theban invasion into the Peloponnesus, the Arcadians began to follow their own direction and also had a falling out with their former Peloponnesian allies the Eleans. This would eventually lead to a major split in the anti-Spartan coalition and a divisive political and military struggle over the key Panhellenic sanctuary of Olympia.

First northern campaign (369)

While Epaminondas was leading his second invasion into the Peloponnesus, the Thebans were asked to intervene in both Thessaly and Macedonia.³⁴ As a result, Plutarch says the Thebans sent out an army under the command of Pelopidas who had requested the assignment because he did not want his skills to go to waste and he knew that Epaminondas did not need the help of another general.³⁵ The Thessalians were struggling with internal strife, with Alexander of Pherae trying to impose his rule over all of Thessaly. Many Thebans probably saw this as a prime opportunity to extend their influence to the north. Pelopidas was able to drive out Alexander and take control of Pherae. He then proceeded to Macedonia where he settled affairs in favor of the Macedonian king, also named Alexander, who cemented the alliance by providing political hostages to Pelopidas, including a young prince named Philip – the future Philip II.³⁶

Second northern campaign (368)

In the following year Pelopidas had to intervene again in Thessaly and Macedonia. Apparently he hired mercenaries in Thessaly and then marched into Macedonia, where the Macedonian king had recently been assassinated. Despite being betrayed by his mercenaries, Pelopidas managed to settle affairs

once more in Thebes's favor – the Macedonians had to provide more political prisoners. Athens had also been meddling in Macedonian affairs; but with Thebes's recent military successes, the Macedonian leadership probably felt that the Thebans were better allies.³⁷ Pelopidas then marched back into Thessaly and looked to punish the families of the treacherous mercenaries who lived in the Thessalian city of Pharsalus. According to Plutarch, Alexander of Pherae arrived with his military forces in front of the city at the same time as Pelopidas. Then, Pelopidas took the inadvisable step of going with a fellow Theban leader named Ismenias to a meeting with Alexander without a bodyguard. He assumed that Alexander would not harm them because of their reputation as Theban leaders. But when Alexander saw they were unaccompanied by bodyguards he seized them and also captured the city of Pharsalus. As soon as the Thebans heard about this they sent out an army to rescue Pelopidas and Ismenias.³⁸ Epaminondas apparently had failed to be elected boeotarch for 368, so he served as a rank-in-file soldier on the campaign. Diodorus tells us that the Thebans were so incensed that they dispatched eight thousand hoplites and six hundred cavalry, the largest recorded field army for Thebes.³⁹ Diodorus's figures probably are not an exaggeration because the Thebans did not send forces to the Peloponnesus in this year.

However, Diodorus says that because of the size of the Theban army Alexander became fearful and sought an alliance with the Athenians, who agreed to an alliance and sent military forces to aid their new ally.⁴⁰ The Thebans soon ran into difficulties because Alexander had significantly more cavalry than the Thebans whose Thessalian allies abandoned them. Therefore, the Thebans decided to retreat from Thessaly, but in the withdrawal they were badly mauled by Alexander's forces. But Diodorus adds,

After they had give up hope of deliverance, the soldiers appointed Epaminondas general even though he was serving as a regular soldier at the time. He immediately selected the light-armed soldiers and cavalrymen and took them with him to form up a rearguard in order to check the enemy pursuers and provide considerable safety for the hoplites in the front ranks. And by wheeling about and fighting and using masterly formations he saved the army. By these repeated successes he more and more increased his personal reputation and received great approval from both his fellow citizens and the allies.⁴¹

Alexander ended up holding Pelopidas captive in the city of Pherae for some time.⁴² However, in 367 the Thebans sent out another military force under the command of Epaminondas who was able to secure the release of Pelopidas and

Ismenias without a major battle. Both sides agreed to a thirty-day truce – Alexander probably did not want to risk a prolonged war with the Thebans and the Thebans undoubtedly were eager to get back one of their leading statesmen.⁴³ Athens and Sparta were continually working to undermine the Theban Hegemony, and many of Thebes's allies were quick to follow their own paths. Athens had recently supported Alexander of Pherae, and Sparta had defeated the Arcadians and probably hoped to regain its former territory of Messenia.⁴⁴

Attempt at a Common Peace (367)

In the same year that Pelopidas was released by Alexander he was sent to the Persian court to negotiate a peace agreement for all of Greece. Just as the Spartans had used the King's Peace of 386 to cement their leading position in Greece, the Thebans undoubtedly felt the time was right to enlist the help of the Persian king Artaxerxes II to secure their hegemony in Greece.⁴⁵ In discussing the embassy of leading Greek envoys at the Persian court, Xenophon writes,

When they were all there, Pelopidas had a great advantage with the Persian king. He was able to say that alone of all the Greeks, the Thebans had fought alongside the king at Plataea, and after that they had never campaigned against the king.... What also greatly contributed to Pelopidas being esteemed was that the Thebans had been victorious at Leuctra and that they had openly ravaged Sparta's territory. Pelopidas also said that the Argives and Arcadians had been defeated in battle by the Spartans because the Thebans had not been present.⁴⁶

Amazingly, this is Xenophon's first mention of the leading Theban statesman Pelopidas. This is generally viewed as a clear indication of a strong anti-Theban bias because Xenophon waits to introduce Pelopidas by name only at the moment that he is leading negotiations with the Persian king. Moreover, Xenophon has Pelopidas begin his address to the king with a reference to the infamous Theban medism during the Persian Wars. Nevertheless, Xenophon acknowledges that Thebes's recent demonstration of its military prowess at Leuctra and its ravaging of Spartan territory had a profound impact on the Persian king. As a result, Artaxerxes II backed Pelopidas's proposal to declare Messenia free and autonomous from Spartan rule and to curb Athenian naval ambitions. However, when the Thebans tried to get the major states back in Greece to agree to the terms they all adamantly refused.⁴⁷

Third invasion of the Peloponnesus (366)

Xenophon places Thebes's third intervention in the Peloponnesus immediately after the city's failed attempt at securing a Common Peace. Much like his delayed introduction of Pelopidas, Xenophon belatedly mentions the other prominent Theban statesman Epaminondas at this late stage in his career. Xenophon probably was countering a tradition – evident in Diodorus's work – of near hero worship of Epaminondas.⁴⁸ Still, Xenophon could not completely ignore the actions of Epaminondas. When Epaminondas marched into the Peloponnesus, he did not alter constitutions or allow democratic factions to exile their oligarchic opponents, even though democratic factions would have been more amenable to democratic Thebes. Epaminondas's expedition specifically targeted the region of Achaea in the northern Peloponnesus, where

Achaean aristocrats supplicated Epaminondas who was able to ensure that the Achaeans would neither exile those in power nor change their constitution. But after he received pledges from the Achaeans that they would be his allies and follow wherever the Thebans led, he returned home. The Arcadians and members of the Achaean opposition denounced Epaminondas for arranging Achaean affairs that favored the Spartans, so the Thebans decided to send military governors to the Achaean cities who drove out the aristocrats with the help of the people and established democracies throughout Achaea. However, the aristocrats quickly banded together and marched against each one of the cities; since they were numerous, they were able to come back from exile and take control of their cities. After they returned, they no longer were neutral but fought zealously for the Spartans.⁴⁹

Epaminondas was one of the fiercest opponents of the Spartans; therefore, it is unlikely he arranged affairs to benefit Sparta. It is more likely that Epaminondas was concerned with maintaining Thebes's moral authority in Greece; or perhaps he was not overly concerned with a city's particular type of government as long as it followed Thebes's lead. Nevertheless, Epaminondas seems to have underestimated the opposition to his policies at home and abroad. The Thebans showed that they were willing to reverse the decisions of their most accomplished general, and that they were willing to follow the earlier Spartan practice of setting up military governors in allied cities.⁵⁰ This entire episode in Xenophon's work may in fact telescope several years of Achaean history, especially events involving a leader of Sicyon named Euphron.⁵¹

Euphron of Sicyon initially seems to have been a supporter of Sparta, but then he switched his allegiance to states opposed to Sparta. Apparently

Euphron claimed he was going to establish a government based on equal rights for all.⁵² However, in his bid to seize absolute control in Sicyon, Xenophon says Euphron hired mercenaries with public and sacred money:

He also appropriated the property of all those he expelled for laconism. He executed some of his fellow-officeholders through deception, and he exiled others. In this way he was able to bring everything under his control and was clearly a tyrant. His allies left these affairs to Euphron because he provided money and eagerly followed them with his mercenaries wherever they went on expeditions.⁵³

Laconism (i.e., siding with the Spartans) was similar to the charge of atticism (i.e., siding with the Athenians) or medism (i.e., siding with the Persians) in that it was an effective charge to level against opponents in the bitter political infighting in Greece. For several years Euphron seems to have remained fiercely opposed to Sparta.⁵⁴

However, when Sicyonian oligarchs eventually regained control of the city, Euphron was forced to flee the city and he sided with the Spartans again. He also obtained a mercenary force from Athens, which he used in combination with the people of Sicyon to take back control of the city. But Xenophon says,

A Theban military governor controlled the acropolis. And since Euphron knew that he could not rule the city with the Thebans in control of the acropolis, he gathered together money and went to Thebes to persuade the Thebans to drive out those in power and give the city back to him. But when the former exiles learned of his journey and preparation, they also made their way to Thebes. When they saw Euphron on friendly terms with the archons, they feared that he would accomplish what he wanted, so they took the risk of assassinating Euphron on the Theban acropolis with the archons and council in session.⁵⁵

Euphron's duplicitous actions finally caught up with him, but the Thebans brought the assassins up on charges for murdering Euphron in their city. In the ensuing trial, Xenophon has one of the assassins claim that he was merely following the example of the Thebans, who had murdered the pro-Spartan leaders during their liberation of the city in 379:

You did not wait for a vote but took revenge as soon as you could, believing that those who are notoriously unholy, who are clearly traitors, and who attempt to become tyrants are condemned to death by all humans. Now wasn't Euphron guilty of all these things? He found sanctuaries full of silver and gold dedications and left them empty. Who

was more clearly a traitor than Euphron? Who was on friendliest terms with the Spartans then chose you instead of them? And who gave and received pledges from you only to betray you and hand over the harbor to your enemies? How without question was he not a tyrant, a man who not only liberated slaves but even made them citizens; and who killed, exiled, and confiscated the property of men who had committed no crimes, simply because it seemed good to him? And these men were aristocrats.⁵⁶

According to Xenophon, the unnamed Sicyonian assassin appealed not only to the ideals of piety and loyalty, but also to maintaining the proper hierarchy in Greece. That is to say, the assassin accused Euphron of completely overturning the established social order by attacking the upper class and enfranchising slaves – a common charge leveled against tyrants as well as leaders of democracies.⁵⁷ Xenophon records that in the end the Thebans judged that Euphron got what he deserved: “However, his fellow citizens believing that he was a good man escorted his body home and buried him in the agora, where they honor him as a founder of the city. Thus it seems that most people define good men as those who benefit them.”⁵⁸

Common Peace (365)

In 365 the major Greek states – with the exception of Sparta – apparently agreed to a cessation of hostilities. Xenophon represents the initiative as coming from the Corinthians, but it probably was a continuation of the earlier Theban attempt to broker a Persian-backed Common Peace.⁵⁹ Diodorus writes, “The Persian king sent off ambassadors and persuaded the Greeks to bring an end to their wars and agree to a Common Peace with one another.”⁶⁰ Most cities were probably tired of the constant fighting and perpetual shifting of alliances – most of Greece had been at war since the last Common Peace enacted just before Leuctra. The peace conference was held at Thebes, and according to Xenophon, all the attendees agreed to the peace based on the principle that “each city should keep possession of its own territory.”⁶¹ This may be an indication that inducements were included in the final negotiations to ensure that Athens would also agree to the Common Peace.⁶² If the Greeks did agree to a Common Peace, however, it did not stop Thebes and other cities from pursuing aggressive foreign policies.

Theban naval program (364)

The temporary halt in hostilities prompted the Thebans to undertake a naval program designed to supplant Athens as the leading naval power in the Aegean. According to Diodorus,

Epaminondas the Theban, who had the greatest reputation among his fellow citizens, spoke to them at a meeting of the assembly and persuaded them to strive for the supremacy of the sea. In his speech that he had given long consideration, he explained that the endeavor was both expedient and possible, proposing in particular that it was easy for those who possessed supremacy on land to acquire the mastery of the sea.⁶³

Diodorus claims Epaminondas used the example of Athens and Sparta during the Persian Wars: although the Athenians had two hundred triremes and the Spartans only had ten, the Spartans led the Greek coalition against the Persian Empire because they were the preeminent land power at the time. Diodorus continues by saying that the Theban people voted to build one hundred triremes and sent Epaminondas out to bring important naval powers into an alliance with Thebes. During the expedition Epaminondas scared off an Athenian squadron and made private alliances with Byzantium, Chios, and Rhodes.⁶⁴ Although Byzantium, Chios, and Rhodes were members of the Second Athenian League, they possibly pledged their private support for Epaminondas's challenge to Athens. Byzantium, in fact, probably revolted from Athens at this time and eventually disrupted the vital grain supply from the Black Sea.⁶⁵ Chios and Rhodes would later revolt during the Social War (357–355), which was a war between the Athenians and their allies that effectively ended the Second Athenian League.

Third northern campaign (364)

In the same year that Epaminondas sailed the Aegean at the head of the short-lived Theban fleet, Pelopidas marched into Thessaly to drive Alexander of Pherae from power. Alexander had captured and installed garrisons in key locations, and the Thessalian opposition once again appealed to Thebes to send out Pelopidas. Plutarch tells us that Pelopidas was especially eager to lead the campaign because he wanted to liberate the oppressed: the Spartans were giving military assistance to Dionysius the tyrant of Sicily, and the Athenians were receiving pay from Alexander of Pherae and setting up bronze statues of him.⁶⁶ As the leaders in Greece, the Thebans probably resorted to the standard claims of fighting for Greek freedom and autonomy against tyrannical oppression.

Initially the Thebans voted to send seven thousand citizen-soldiers with Pelopidas; but when an eclipse of the sun occurred on July 13, 364, the majority of the soldiers declined to go on the campaign because it was seen as a bad omen.⁶⁷ Plutarch says Pelopidas did not want to take soldiers that were less than enthusiastic because of the eclipse, so he set out from Thebes with

three hundred volunteer cavalymen and a contingent of mercenaries. The Thessalians, in fact, made up the bulk of his army once he made his way to Thessaly.⁶⁸ The armies of Pelopidas and Alexander of Pherae eventually fought a major battle in the heart of Thessaly at Cynoscephalae.⁶⁹ According to Plutarch, Pelopidas made a determined charge against Alexander and won a decisive victory, but during the fighting Pelopidas was killed. Plutarch says the Thessalians mourned Pelopidas's death just as much as the Thebans did. He had continually fought on behalf of the Thessalians against the aggressions of Alexander of Pherae, and they begged the Thebans to allow them to bury Pelopidas in Thessaly, which the Thebans granted.⁷⁰

For a decade and a half Pelopidas was one of the foremost leaders in Greece. He helped liberate the city of Thebes in 379, he defeated the Spartans at Tegyra in 375, and he probably led the main charge of the Sacred Band at Leuctra in 371. In addition to his frequent campaigns into Thessaly in the 360s, he helped lead the initial invasion into the Peloponnesus and extended Theban influence into Macedonia. He also played a crucial role in attempts to bring about a Common Peace in Greece. Most of our ancient sources portray Pelopidas in a very favorable light, but Polybius criticizes the Theban leader for naively trusting Alexander of Pherae. He says that Pelopidas had been the one to convince Epaminondas to champion democracy and oppose tyranny throughout Greece. But Pelopidas did great harm to Thebes and his own reputation when he was captured by Alexander.⁷¹

Destruction of Orchomenus (364)

Apparently while Epaminondas was sailing the Aegean and Pelopidas was on campaign in Thessaly, an oligarchic plot to overthrow the Boeotian democracy was uncovered at Thebes. Diodorus relates that some oligarchic exiles enlisted the help of three hundred Orchomenian cavalymen to change the constitution of the Boeotian federation. On the day proposed for the armed insurrection, however, the exiles changed their minds and informed the boeotarchs that the Orchomenian cavalymen planned to attack the government. The Orchomenians were arrested, convicted, and executed. Then, the Boeotians voted to send out an army against Orchomenus and destroy the city. There was a long history of bitter rivalry between Thebes and Orchomenus.⁷² As a consequence, Diodorus states, "Since the Thebans thought they had a good opportunity and a reasonable excuse for exacting revenge, they marched against Orchomenus. After they occupied the city and slew the male inhabitants, they sold the women and children into slavery."⁷³ Plutarch claims that if Epaminondas and Pelopidas had been present in Thebes they would not have allowed the Thebans to destroy Orchomenus.⁷⁴ But the Thebans did not

always follow their lead, despite their many successes. Orchomenus – like Plataea and Thespieae – had been a frequent center of opposition to Thebes, and its destruction was a clear indication of how far the Thebans were willing to go to maintain their leading position in Boeotia and Greece.

Fourth invasion of the Peloponnesus (362)

The last major event of the Theban Hegemony, as commonly recognized by modern scholars, involved the Thebans sending another army into the Peloponnesus to assist their allies.⁷⁵ Civil strife had broken out in the Arcadian League over the use of sacred funds from the sanctuary of Olympia.⁷⁶ Alongside Delphi, Olympia was one of the two most important religious sites in ancient Greece. The Arcadians had been using the funds to pay their federal army for a war against Elis. Oligarchs in Mantinea apparently had induced the Arcadians to cease using the funds, which meant that poorer citizens could no longer afford to serve in the army in large numbers. As a result, pro-Thebans became concerned that the Arcadian League would sever its ties with Thebes and conclude an alliance with Sparta: at this time the lower classes favored democratic Thebes, and the upper classes looked to oligarchic Sparta.⁷⁷ Another Arcadian city, Tegea, remained staunchly pro-Theban and opposed to its fellow Arcadian city of Mantinea. One of the main reasons the Tegeans were unswerving in their adherence to the Theban alliance was that there was a Theban military governor and garrison of three hundred Boeotian hoplites stationed in the city.⁷⁸ In fact, during peace celebrations in Tegea marking the end of hostilities between Arcadia and Elis, the Theban governor arrested Arcadians in the city who were members of the anti-Theban oligarchic faction. He eventually released all the men he had taken into custody, but the Thebans were furious that Arcadia had made peace with Elis without consulting them. In the early years of the Theban Hegemony, the Arcadians had been strong allies of Thebes but as time went on relations became worse and worse.⁷⁹

Epaminondas once again led the Theban invasion of the Peloponnesus and demonstrated his superior abilities as a general. Even the anti-Theban writer Xenophon could not help but praise his skills as a military leader: “I would not say that Epaminondas’s campaign was fortunate, but he was second to none in preparation and boldness.”⁸⁰ Xenophon later adds, “What seems more remarkable to me was that Epaminondas prepared his army so well that his soldiers never tired from work day or night, they did not run away from any danger, and even when provisions were scarce they still were willing to obey.”⁸¹ Epaminondas at one point even led a surprise invasion into Laconia, including a failed attempt to take the city of Sparta. After that he marched his army back into Arcadia and took up a position just outside the city of

Battle of Mantineia (362)

Epaminondas had allies from all over Greece, including the Arcadian cities of Tegea and Megalopolis.⁸² The Spartans also had military forces from major cities, particularly Athens and Mantineia.⁸³ Diodorus says Epaminondas had more than thirty thousand hoplites and three thousand cavalrymen, while the Spartans had only some twenty thousand hoplites and two thousand cavalrymen.⁸⁴ In a similar fashion to his successful tactics at Leuctra, Epaminondas increased the depth of his left wing and used it to charge the enemy. Ancient and modern authors often remark on the supposed novel approach of Epaminondas advancing in echelon, but it may have just been a natural consequence of the military units around the commander advancing first.⁸⁵ Xenophon says Epaminondas interspersed light-armed soldiers among his cavalry forces to help break through the enemy cavalry – the latter of which did not contain any light-armed troops.⁸⁶ Light-armed soldiers could be highly effective against hoplites if skillfully deployed.⁸⁷ And on at least one earlier occasion, the Boeotians had interspersed light-armed soldiers within their cavalry ranks.⁸⁸

Epaminondas, however, seems to have taken the added step of stationing hoplites with his cavalry forces arrayed on both wings.⁸⁹ In the initial stages of the battle, Epaminondas's cavalry was victorious, and then he led a decisive infantry charge. Xenophon writes,

By defeating the section of the army where he charged, Epaminondas caused a rout of all enemy forces. But when Epaminondas himself fell, the rest of his forces were not able to properly exploit the victory. Even though the enemy phalanx was routed, his hoplites did not kill anyone beyond the place where the initial clash took place. His cavalrymen also did not kill any of the fleeing horsemen, since they did not chase the enemy horsemen or hoplites – they timidly slipped away through the lines of the fleeing enemy, as if they had been defeated. Both the infantry stationed with the cavalry and the peltasts who shared in the cavalry's victory marched against the enemy's left wing as victors, but the majority of them were killed there by the Athenians.⁹⁰

Both sides claimed victory by setting up battlefield trophies; they also received back their dead under truce. Xenophon ends his account of fourth-century Greek affairs thus: “Although each side said they won, neither side appeared to have gained anything – no territory, no city, no increased rule – that they did not have prior to the battle. There was even more confusion and disorder in

Greece after the battle than there was before.”⁹¹ A Common Peace was eventually signed among the major powers with the exception of Sparta: Sparta could not agree to the key component of the Common Peace, the autonomy clause that guaranteed the independence of Messenia. The Spartans were excluded but the rest of Greece agreed to peace.⁹² A year after Mantinea, the Thebans intervened in Peloponnesian affairs again, helping to forestall a major break in the Arcadian League, which helped to ensure that Sparta could not revive its ambitions in the Peloponnesus.⁹³ The Thebans would continue to be the strongest land power in Greece for roughly two decades.

Third Sacred War (356–346)

Nevertheless, the Thebans seem to have been relatively inactive in the early years of the 350s. Athens, on the other hand, continued to pursue an aggressive foreign policy, especially on the island of Euboea. The Euboeans had been allies of Thebes since the battle of Leuctra, but in 357 the Athenians intervened in factional strife and were able to detach the island from its alliance with Thebes.⁹⁴ In the same year, the Thebans sought to revive their leading role in Greece by pushing through a decree in the Amphictyonic League declaring war on those states that failed to pay their debts to Apollo, an action that specifically targeted the Phocians and Spartans.⁹⁵ The Amphictyonic League consisted of delegates primarily from northern and central Greece and oversaw the protection of the sanctuary of Delphi and the famous oracle of Apollo. Because Delphi was one of the two most important Panhellenic sites in Greece, it frequently served as a prime political battleground between Greek states. Apparently, the Thebans were confident enough in their military strength to provoke another major war. However, instead of bowing to Theban pressure, the Phocians seized the sanctuary of Delphi, having been given secret assurances of Spartan support.⁹⁶ The Phocians soon after were able to secure public alliances with the Spartans, Athenians, Achaeans, and Corinthians.⁹⁷ The Thebans also had many allies, and once the Phocians began using the sacred funds from Delphi to raise large mercenary armies, the Thebans were able to denounce the Phocians as temple robbers.⁹⁸

The Third Sacred War was characterized by the ever-increasing use of mercenary forces against traditional citizen-soldiers.⁹⁹ In addition to relying on larger and larger numbers of mercenaries, the Phocians voted autocratic powers for successive generals, which allowed the military to dominate the government and society. The first Phocian general given supreme authority was a leader named Philomelus. After he took control of Delphi, he executed and confiscated the property of wealthy Delphians opposed to his seizure of

the sanctuary. Philomelus then defeated the Locrians, who were traditional enemies of the Phocians and close allies of the Thebans. After throwing up a wall around the already formidable mountainous terrain of Delphi, Philomelus prepared for a sustained war with the Thebans and their allies by raising a large mercenary army.¹⁰⁰

The first major military engagement between the allied armies of the Phocians and Thebans occurred in Phocian territory near Neon in 355.¹⁰¹ Diodorus says that the Theban forces outnumbered those of the Phocians: the Thebans may have led as many as thirteen thousand troops and the Phocians over eleven thousand soldiers.¹⁰² The Thebans and their allies decisively defeated the Phocian-led forces, managing to kill large numbers of Phocians and mercenaries. Diodorus adds, “After Philomelus fought bravely and had suffered many wounds, he was driven into a precipitous place and hemmed in. And since he had no escape and feared being tortured after capture, he threw himself over the cliff and ended his life, thus atoning to the god.”¹⁰³ Because Philomelus had seized control of the sanctuary and committed atrocities, his death was seen as deserved. The Thebans did not go on to attack the fortified sanctuary of Delphi, probably believing that their decisive victory and the death of the Philomelus would bring the conflict to a quick resolution.



Figure 6.4 Sanctuary of Delphi above the theater

In fact, the Thebans soon sent out an expeditionary force to aid a rebel satrap, or provincial governor, against the Persian king Artaxerxes III. Diodorus claims that the Theban general Pammenes “achieved great glory for

himself and the Boeotians,” adding, “Now it seemed amazing that after the Boeotians were abandoned by the Thessalians and the war with Phocis brought them great dangers, they were sending armies across the sea into Asia and for the most part were successful in their ventures.”¹⁰⁴ By supporting a rebel satrap of the Persian Empire, the Thebans were continuing in the line of earlier hegemonic powers, both Athens and Sparta had justified much of their hegemonies on anti-Persian rhetoric. Very quickly, however, the Phocians elected an aggressive leader named Onomarchus with supreme powers to continue the war against Thebes, which forced the Thebans to look to outside help to fund their war effort.

The Thebans soon found that the Third Sacred War was unlike any other conflict they had experienced. Because the Phocians had access to the vast treasures and dedicatory objects in the sanctuary of Delphi, they could continually replenish their mercenary forces. Beyond the money that Pammenes certainly received during his campaign on behalf of the rebel Persian satrap, the Thebans needed additional financial contributions from their allies to fight the war against the Phocians. An inscription dated to the years 354–352 records the contributions of various allies to the Boeotians who are said to have been “waging war on those committing sacrilege against the sanctuary of Pythian Apollo.”¹⁰⁵ The Thebans were also helped by the entry into the war of the young king of Macedonia, Philip II.

As a teenager Philip had been a hostage in Thebes for several years in the 360s.¹⁰⁶ In 359, at the age of twenty-three, Philip became king of Macedonia; soon thereafter he gradually began expanding his kingdom’s influence.¹⁰⁷ A year after ascending the throne he formed an alliance with the Thessalians opposed to the tyrants of Pherae.¹⁰⁸ In 354 he intervened again in Thessalian affairs, but this time it brought a reaction from the Phocians who were allies of Lycophron the tyrant of Pherae. Philip was victorious against the initial Phocian forces sent into Thessaly, but then the Phocian general Onomarchus and his army marched into Thessaly and routed Philip. This would be the greatest military defeat of Philip’s career. Diodorus says that Onomarchus outnumbered Philip and defeated him on two separate occasions.¹⁰⁹ According to another late source Polyaeus, in one of these engagements Onomarchus

drew up in battle order against the Macedonians with a crescent-shaped mountain in his rear. On the tops of each side of the mountain he had placed in ambush engines for throwing stones and led his force to the plain below. When the Macedonians began the attack with their javelins, the Phocians pretended to flee in between the mountain. The Macedonians eagerly and forcefully pursued and pressed upon them, but then those on the tops of the mountain unleashed the stones and shattered the

Macedonian phalanx. At that point, Onomarchus gave the signal to the Phocians to turn around and attack their enemies. The Macedonians, who were being attacked by those who had turned around and the barrage of stones from above, were forced to flee and retreated with great difficulty. On this occasion, Philip the king of Macedonia is said to have spoken the following: "I do not flee, but rather I withdraw like a ram, so that I may make a more violent charge hereafter."¹¹⁰

After being outgeneraled by Onomarchus Philip withdrew to Macedonia.

In the following campaigning season, Philip showed how quickly he learned from his mistakes. In what has become known as the battle of the Crocus Field, Philip engaged Onomarchus in one of the deadliest battles in ancient Greek history.¹¹¹ The two armies had roughly the same number of infantrymen – some twenty thousand on each side – but Philip had significantly more cavalrymen – three thousand compared to five hundred. Diodorus primarily attributes Philip's victory to the Thessalian cavalry, but Philip's skillful coordination of his various contingents also must have played a decisive role.¹¹² Diodorus concludes his brief account of the battle by saying, "More than six thousand of the Phocians and mercenaries were killed, and among them the general himself; and no less than three thousand were taken captive. Philip crucified Onomarchus, and he drowned the others in the sea as temple-robbers."¹¹³ If the Phocian army had been a traditional force composed of citizen-soldiers, the loss of almost half its manpower would have ended Phocis's ability to continue the Third Sacred War.

However, in the next campaigning season the Phocians were able to launch an invasion into Boeotia. Not only did the Phocians have the seemingly endless supply of Delphi's riches to convert into pay for new mercenary forces, but they also received numerous troops from Sparta, Athens, Achaea, and tyrants expelled from the city of Pherae in Thessaly.¹¹⁴ The Thebans and their Boeotian allies did not have a comparable source of revenue to wage the Third Sacred War, but their citizen-soldiers continued to demonstrate their resilience. They were victorious in multiple engagements fought in Boeotia in 352.¹¹⁵ And in the next year, the Thebans took the offensive and carried the war into Phocis. This compelled the Phocians to conduct a counter invasion, but in a significant cavalry engagement the Thebans and their allies again proved victorious.¹¹⁶

At the same time that the Thebans were engaging in what amounted to border clashes with the Phocians, they also sent military forces into the Peloponnesus. Diodorus says that the Thebans sent the general Cephision with four thousand infantrymen and five hundred cavalry to assist Megalopolis in a war against the Spartans.¹¹⁷ This was a significant amount considering the fact

that the Thebans were still waging war in central Greece. On earlier occasions in the Classical Age the Thebans usually did not send substantially more troops into the Peloponnesus.¹¹⁸ The heavily fortified city of Megalopolis served as a major obstacle for Sparta to recover Messenia and its dominant position in the Peloponnesus. After a series of inconclusive military engagements – perhaps in two different campaigning seasons in 352 and 351 – the Spartans concluded an armistice with Megalopolis and the Thebans returned home.¹¹⁹ Then they invaded Phocis with a large army and plundered the countryside, after which they returned to Boeotia.¹²⁰

Despite this windfall, Diodorus claims that the Thebans soon sought Persian financial assistance to continue their war with Phocis. They sent ambassadors to Artaxerxes III who gave them three hundred talents of silver.¹²¹ Apparently Artaxerxes III did not hold a grudge against the Thebans for their earlier support of a rebel Persian satrap.¹²² However, Artaxerxes III very likely expected the Thebans to eventually repay this gift by sending soldiers to help him reconquer lost territory. At some point – probably after the Third Sacred War – the Thebans sent out a general named Lacrates with one thousand troops to help Artaxerxes III retake Egypt.¹²³

Even with the large infusion of Persian money, the Thebans were unable to keep the Phocians and their mercenary armies from invading Boeotia. In fact, by the end of the war the Phocians had control of the eastern Boeotian cities of Orchomenus, Coronea, and Chorsiae, and were conducting annual campaigns from these strongholds.¹²⁴ Therefore, the Thebans now sent ambassadors to the Macedonian king Philip who was “pleased to see their humiliation and wanted to humble the Boeotians’ pride over Leuctra.”¹²⁵ Philip now replaced the Persian king as the arbiter of disputes in Greece. In the past Persian kings had used money and the threat of military intervention to help end Panhellenic wars. Although there were benefits to keeping the Greek states at war, Philip could feign concern for the sanctuary of Delphi.

First, however, Philip had to secure the route into central Greece through Thermopylae, which the Athenians had earlier blocked after Philip’s victory at the Crocus Field.¹²⁶ Not only were the Athenians allies of the Phocians, but they had also been openly hostile to Philip since his capture of Amphipolis in 357. Amphipolis was a former Athenian colony in a strategic location east of Macedonia: the Athenians had been trying to recover it since 424 because it was located along the coastal route from the Hellespont and it had access to the valuable timber and mineral resources of Thrace.¹²⁷ This time Philip distracted the Athenians with a peace offer. After numerous embassies and intense negotiations, Philip and the Athenians in 346 signed what has become known as the Peace of Philocrates.¹²⁸ This peace kept the Athenians from helping the Phocians block the pass at Thermopylae and allowed Philip to

bring his army safely into central Greece. Once Philip arrived in central Greece with his large army, which included Boeotians and Thessalians, he forced the Phocians to surrender, thus ending the Third Sacred War and taking control of the Phocians' vote in the Amphictyonic League. The Phocians were required to disarm and make an annual payment of sixty talents to repay all that had been taken from the sanctuary of Delphi. The Phocians also had to give up control of the Boeotian cities they had taken in the war and were no longer allowed to live in fortified urban centers.¹²⁹ Through deft diplomacy and an overwhelming show of force, Philip was now the most powerful leader in Greece. After Philip helped the Boeotians and Thessalians conduct the Pythian games at Delphi, which were musical and athletic competitions next in importance to the Olympic games, he returned to Macedonia. It was probably after the conclusion of the Third Sacred War that the Thebans now dispatched a military force to help the Persian king Artaxerxes III retake Egypt.¹³⁰ Besides this expedition, however, there seems to have been little Theban activity until the momentous battle of Chaeronea in 338.

Chaeronea (338)

Chaeronea was the last great battle for Greek independence in the Classical Age. It was the culmination of Philip's open declaration of war against Athens as well as another sacred war in Greece. In 340, Philip officially repudiated the terms of the Peace of Philocrates by attacking the Athenian ally Byzantium and seizing the grain supply from the Black Sea.¹³¹ Then, in 339 the Amphictyonic League declared another sacred war – the so-called Fourth Sacred War – and invited Philip to lead a military campaign against the central Greek state of Amphisssa, which was accused of cultivating sacred territory near Delphi. According to the Athenian orator Aeschines, the Amphisssans had planned to charge the Athenians with sacrilege for rededicating captured enemy shields at Delphi. Significantly, the shields were those taken from defeated Persians and Thebans at the battle of Plataea in 479, which served as a reminder of Thebes's medism during the Persian Wars. It is not entirely clear why the Athenians were willing to provoke hostilities with Thebes at this point, but it demonstrates the continuing rivalry between Athens and Thebes. Nevertheless, at the spring meeting of the Amphictyonic League in 339, Aeschines delivered such an effective oration against the Amphisssans that a sacred war was declared on Amphisssa instead of Athens.¹³²

With war looming the Thebans seized control of the stronghold of Nicaea near Thermopylae to block Philip's entrance into central Greece; Philip had installed a Macedonian garrison in Nicaea, which the Thebans expelled and

replaced with their own garrison. However, Philip simply used an alternative route to bypass the Theban position and then sent representatives to Thebes to negotiate an alliance, or at least permission to march through Boeotia en route to invade Athens.¹³³ At the same time, the Athenians sent ambassadors to Thebes to persuade the Thebans to join Athens instead of Philip in the coming war. The famous Athenian orator Demosthenes – who was fiercely opposed to Philip – was part of the delegation sent to Thebes. According to Aeschines, Demosthenes promised the Thebans that Athens would recognize Thebes's supremacy in Boeotia, pay for two-thirds of the land campaign and all naval costs, and, most important, cede the leadership of the land forces to Thebes and jointly share the naval command.¹³⁴ Although Aeschines was a bitter rival of Demosthenes – and thus had a strong motive to distort the terms – the basic facts were probably beyond dispute. The Athenians had to offer Thebes the best terms possible if they had any hope of winning over the strongest land power in Greece. Clearly the Thebans were already leaning toward opposing Philip's actions in Greece by expelling the Macedonian garrison from Nicaea, but they were probably still Philip's allies since the end of the Third Sacred War.¹³⁵

The Thebans and their Boeotian allies ultimately decided to join the Athenian war effort, most likely realizing that they would be next if Philip managed to conquer Athens. By this time Philip had transformed the Macedonian army into a formidable military machine. He had more than thirty thousand battle-hardened infantrymen and no less than two thousand cavalry.¹³⁶ The Thebans and Athenians were joined by a handful of states – in particular, Corinth, Megara, Achaea, Acarnania, Euboea, Corcyra, and Leucas.¹³⁷ The two sides may have had about the same number of soldiers, but once they engaged in battle in early August of 338 Philip proved that a traditional hoplite force was no longer a match for his Macedonian army.¹³⁸

Philip probably led his infantry forces from the right wing and stationed his son Alexander on the left wing with seasoned generals. Alexander faced the Thebans and was the first to break the enemy line but then Philip followed up with a decisive victory over the Athenians.¹³⁹ There is some indication that Philip conducted a feint retreat with his right wing and then counterattacked the Athenians late in the engagement.¹⁴⁰ This would have required considerable practice and discipline, both of which the Macedonians would have acquired through constant campaigning under Philip. It was also reminiscent of the tactic the Phocians used to defeat Philip years earlier.¹⁴¹ The strongest contingent in the Greek army was the Theban Sacred Band, which directly opposed Alexander on the Macedonian left wing. After stout resistance, however, the Sacred Band was annihilated. According to Plutarch, the Sacred Band

remained unconquered until the battle of Chaeronea. And when Philip was surveying the dead after the battle, he stopped at the very place where the three hundred were lying – all those who had faced the long spears of his phalanx, with their armor and mingled with one another. He was amazed, and when he learned that this was the band of lovers and beloveds, he cried and said: “May all those who think that these men did or suffered anything shameful die a horrible death.”¹⁴²

The Theban Sacred Band may in fact have been wiped out almost to the man at Chaeronea. Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of two hundred and fifty-four soldiers buried near the famous lion monument at Chaeronea, and many of the bones of the interred bodies show evidence of blunt force trauma characteristic of battle wounds.¹⁴³ The travel writer Pausanias says that at Chaeronea



Figure 6.5 Lion monument and burial enclosure at Chaeronea

there is a common grave of the Thebans who were killed in the battle against Philip. It has no inscription but there is a lion monument over it, which probably refers to the strength of the men. It seems to me there is no inscription because their courage was not followed by the appropriate good fortune.¹⁴⁴

The lion monument was most likely built in the Hellenistic Age, but the burial of the Theban dead probably took place soon after the battle.¹⁴⁵

Philip's victory at Chaeronea made him master of Greece, but he had to proceed cautiously not to incite further opposition. He treated Athens with deference.¹⁴⁶ Yet he installed a garrison and pro-Macedonian oligarchy in Thebes.¹⁴⁷ Philip also set up a garrison at Corinth where he established the League of Corinth – a settlement that gave him clear dominance over the Greek cities. Individuals and states were made to swear that they would not break the agreement with Philip or go to war against him. They also swore to maintain the existing constitutions in each state and “to wage war against the one who transgresses the Common Peace as decided by the common council and when the leader summons them.”¹⁴⁸ The League of Corinth had a council composed of delegates from various Greek states, but Philip was the official leader.



Figure 6.6 Acrocorinth looking northwest

After settling affairs in Greece, Philip returned to Macedonia and began plans to invade the Persian Empire. In July of 336, however, Philip was assassinated at the age of forty-six.¹⁴⁹ Alexander was only twenty at the time but immediately succeeded Philip. After he solidified his position as king of Macedonia, Alexander quickly put down a revolt in Greece and had his leadership of the League of Corinth confirmed.¹⁵⁰ Diodorus says the Thebans had voted to expel the Macedonian garrison, but Alexander's swift march south seems to have deterred a full-scale Theban revolt.¹⁵¹

Destruction of Thebes (335)

In the next year, however, while Alexander was campaigning in Illyria northwest of Macedonia, anti-Macedonian exiles returned to Thebes and persuaded the Thebans to revolt. Arrian says that Theban exiles

came to the assembly and incited the Thebans to revolt from Alexander. They offered freedom, an ancient and noble word, and incited them to liberate themselves from the oppression of the Macedonians. They seemed more persuasive to the people because they insisted that Alexander had died in the land of the Illyrians.¹⁵²

Alexander immediately marched south. In a mere fourteen days Alexander appeared before the city of Thebes with his entire army.¹⁵³ The Thebans constructed a double palisade to protect against the Macedonian garrison encamped on the Cadmea and Alexander's army. After failed negotiations, Alexander engaged the Theban army in a fierce battle just outside the city walls. Alexander attacked in waves using a combination of heavily armed infantrymen and auxiliary troops. After intense fighting the Macedonians drove the Thebans back inside the city following close behind. Eventually the Macedonians and their allies engaged in a mass slaughter and enslaved the Theban population – a total of six thousand individuals were killed and thirty thousand men, women, and children were sold as slaves. Alexander wanted to send a clear message to the other Greek cities about the deadly consequences of revolting from Macedonia. The siege of Thebes was not without Macedonian casualties, however. The Macedonian dead amounted to more than five hundred soldiers. After the mass enslavement of the remaining Theban population, Alexander installed a garrison on the sacred Cadmea and destroyed the rest of the city. Thus ended Classical Thebes.¹⁵⁴

The fourth century turned out to be the high point of power and prestige for ancient Thebes. In Hellenistic and Roman Thebes, the city never regained even a semblance of its former political and military power, but the famous battles of Leuctra and Mantinea became historical touchstones for what the Thebans had been able to achieve during their brief tenure as leaders of Greece.

Notes

- 1 For discussion of the inscribed grave stele commemorating the victory at Leuctra shown in Figure 6.1, see Rhodes and Osborne 2003, no. 30; Mackil 2013, 415–416.
- 2 Diod. 15.1.3, 15.50.2, 15.65.1. Cf. Plut. *Ages.* 31.2.

- 3 See Worthington 2008, 27–29.
- 4 For the League of Corinth, see Harding 1985, no. 99; Rhodes and Osborne 2003, no. 76.
- 5 Arr. *Anab.* 1.9.9–10.
- 6 Jehne 1999; Mackil 2013, 71–85. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.38–39; Tuplin 1993, 149 n. 6.
- 7 Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.1–3. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.5, 6.5.10, 6.5.36. For the series of fourth-century peace treaties known as Common Peaces that were based on the fundamental principle of autonomy, see Ryder 1965; Jehne 1994.
- 8 Diod. 15.57.1.
- 9 Diod. 15.62.3–5. Cf. Dem. 16.12.
- 10 Diod. 15.81.2; Plut. *Pel.* 24.2; Plut. *Ages.* 31.1.
- 11 Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.32, 7.2.2; Plut. *Ages.* 32.7.
- 12 Cartledge 1987, 15–16.
- 13 Cartledge 1987, 39–40.
- 14 Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.23–25. Cf. Plut. *Pel.* 24.1–2. See Map 1 Regions and cities.
- 15 Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.28–29.
- 16 Diod. 15.65.2; Plut. *Ages.* 32.2. For discussion and earlier bibliography, see Stylianou 1998, 432–434.
- 17 Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.32; Diod. 15.65.2–5; Plut. *Ages.* 31.3, 32.1, 32.3.
- 18 Diod. 15.1.3, 15.50.2, 15.65.1. Cf. Plut. *Ages.* 31.2.
- 19 Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.32.
- 20 See Map 1 Regions and cities.
- 21 Diod. 15.66.1. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.27; Isoc. 6.28; Plut. *Pel.* 24.5; Plut. *Ages.* 34.1; Paus. 4.26–27, 9.14.5.
- 22 See Stylianou 1998, 435–436.
- 23 For Sparta’s manpower shortage, see Cartledge 2002, 263–272.
- 24 Plut. *Pel.* 25.1–2. Cf. Diod. 15.67.1; Plut. *Ages.* 32.8. For the trials of Epaminondas and Pelopidas, see Buckler 1980, 138–142.
- 25 Buckler 1980, 142–143.
- 26 Plut. *Pel.* 25.3–7.
- 27 Diod. 15.79.3–5; Buckler 1980, 145–150.
- 28 Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.1. For a discussion of the problematic chronology of the 360s, see Buckler 1980, 233–262; Stylianou 1998, 446–455.
- 29 Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.16. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.23.
- 30 Diod. 15.68.1.
- 31 Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.19.
- 32 Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.22–23. Cf. Hdt. 8.73; Thuc. 4.95.2.
- 33 Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.3–11, 7.1.24, 7.1.39, 7.4.2–3, 7.4.22, 7.4.33–34, 7.4.36, 7.5.3; Diod. 15.59.1, 15.62.2, 15.67.2; Rhodes and Osborne 2003, no. 32; Nielsen 2015.

- 34 See Map 1 Regions and cities.
- 35 Plut. *Pel.* 26.1. Cf. Diod. 15.67.3–4.
- 36 Plut. *Pel.* 26.3–5; Diod. 15.67.4. Cf. Aeschin. 2.26–29. See Worthington 2008, 17–19.
- 37 Aeschin. 2.26–29; Plut. *Pel.* 26.2–3; Diod. 15.71.1.
- 38 Plut. *Pel.* 27.5–28.1. Cf. Polyb. 8.35.6–8.
- 39 Diod. 15.71.3.
- 40 Diod. 15.71.3–4. Cf. Dem. 23.120; Plut. *Pel.* 31.4.
- 41 Diod. 15.71.6–7. Cf. Plut. *Mor.* 680B, 797A–B; Nepos *Epaminondas* 7.1–3; Paus. 9.15.1–2.
- 42 Cf. Plut. *Pel.* 28; Georgiadou 1997, 199–201.
- 43 Plut. *Pel.* 29.5; Diod. 15.75.2.
- 44 Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.24–32; Diod. 15.72.3–4.
- 45 Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.36.
- 46 Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.34–35.
- 47 Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.36–40. Cf. Plut. *Pel.* 30.1–5; Diod. 15.76.3. For discussion and bibliography, see Stylianou 1998, 485–489.
- 48 See Tuplin 1993, 154.
- 49 Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.42–43.
- 50 For Theban governors and garrisons in Peloponnesian cities, see Xen. *Hell.* 7.2.11, 7.2.14, 7.3.4, 7.3.9, 7.4.36–40. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.18, 7.1.22, 7.2.2; Diod. 15.69.1.
- 51 For good discussions of Euphron, see Tuplin 1993, 121–124; Lewis 2004.
- 52 Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.45.
- 53 Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.46.
- 54 Xen. *Hell.* 7.2.11–12, 7.2.15.
- 55 Xen. *Hell.* 7.3.4–5. Modern scholars are divided on whether this was the local council of Thebes or the council of the Boeotian federation. There is a third possibility that it was a council meeting of Thebes’s allies: cf. Xen. *Hell.* 7.3.11. For discussion and bibliography, see Buckler and Beck 2008, 165–179.
- 56 Xen. *Hell.* 7.3.7–8.
- 57 Sian Lewis (2004, 74) says, “Viewed from the right perspective, almost any ruler or regime could be claimed as a tyranny, and the judgement we make on any given regime depends to a large extent on the ideology of the historian who described it.”
- 58 Xen. *Hell.* 7.3.12.
- 59 Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.6–10. Cf. Plut. *Pel.* 30.1–5.
- 60 Diod. 15.76.3. For discussion and earlier bibliography, see Stylianou 1998, 485–489.
- 61 Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.10.

- 62 Cf. Dem. 9.16.
- 63 Diod. 15.78.4. Cf. Isoc. 5.53; Aeschin. 2.105; Plut. *Phil.* 14.1–2.
- 64 Diod. 15.79.1. For discussions of this short-lived naval venture of the Thebans, see Stylianou 1998, 494–497; Jehne 1999, 328–344; Buckler and Beck 2008, 199–210. Several fourth-century inscriptions have been connected with the Theban naval program, but the evidence is inconclusive: see Rhodes and Osborne 2003, no. 43. Also see Map 1 Regions and cities.
- 65 Cf. Dem. 50.6. Athens did not grow enough grain to feed its sizeable population so it had to rely on imports from the Black Sea region. The Spartans were able to help bring an end to both the Peloponnesian War and Corinthian War by gaining control of the Hellespont, the narrow sea lane connecting the Aegean to the Black Sea: Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.27–30, 2.2.1–2, 2.2.21, 5.1.28.
- 66 Plut. *Pel.* 31.4.
- 67 Plut. *Pel.* 31.2; Diod. 15.80.2.
- 68 Plut. *Pel.* 32.1; Diod. 15.80.4.
- 69 See Map 2 Battle sites.
- 70 Plut. *Pel.* 32–33. Cf. Plut. *Pel.* 35.1–2.
- 71 Polyb. 8.35.6–8.
- 72 For the whole episode, see Diod. 15.79.3–5; Stylianou 1998, 453–454, 497–498.
- 73 Diod. 15.79.6. Cf. Dem. 20.109.
- 74 Plut. *Comparison of Pelopidas and Marcellus* 1. Cf. Paus. 9.15.3.
- 75 However, Thebes was still a leading power in Greece at least until the end of the Third Sacred War in 346: Mackil 2013, 71–85.
- 76 See Map 1 Regions and cities.
- 77 Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.33–34. Cf. Diod. 15.82.1.
- 78 Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.36.
- 79 Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.22–24, 7.1.32. 7.1.39.
- 80 Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.8.
- 81 Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.19.
- 82 Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.4–5. See Map 1 Regions and cities.
- 83 Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.18.
- 84 Diod. 15.84.4. Cf. Stylianou 1998, 513–514.
- 85 Cf. Tuplin 1993, 135.
- 86 Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.23–24.
- 87 Thuc. 3.97–98, 4.31–38; Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.33, 3.2.2–5, 4.2.14, 4.5.11–18, 5.1.10–12. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.16–17.
- 88 Thuc. 5.57.2. Cf. Hdt. 7.158.4; Xen. *Hipparch.* 5.13; *Ath. Pol.* 49.1; Philochorus *FGrH* 328 F 71; Caesar *BG* 1.48.5; Gomme et al. 1945–1981,

4.79–80.

- 89 Diod. 15.85.2–8. For citations of ancient sources and discussion of cavalry engagements in ancient Greek warfare, see Tuplin 1993, 186–187.
- 90 Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.24–25.
- 91 Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.27.
- 92 Polybius 4.33.8–9; Diod. 15.89.1–2; Plut. *Ages.* 35.2–4; Harding 1985, no. 57; Rhodes and Osborne 2003, no. 42. For discussion of this Common Peace, see Stylianou 1998, 519–521.
- 93 Diod. 15.94.1–3; Dem. 16.19, 16.27–29. Cf. Harding 1985, no. 56; Rhodes and Osborne 2003, no. 41.
- 94 For ancient and modern sources, see Rhodes and Osborne 2003, no. 48.
- 95 Diod. 16.23.1–5, 16.29.2–4. Cf. Aeschin. 3.107–112; Paus. 10.2.1, 10.15.1; Justin 8.1.
- 96 Diod. 16.24.1–2.
- 97 Diod. 16.27.5, 16.30.4, 16.37.3, 16.60.2; Dem. 19.61; Aeschin. 3.118.
- 98 Diod. 16.29.1, 16.30–31; Plut. *Tim.* 30.4. Cf. Diod. 16.14.3–5, 16.28.2, 16.56.5.
- 99 The main source for the Third Sacred War is Diod. 16.23–40 with a few brief references in Paus. 10.2 and Justin 8.1–2. For the first two authors, see Ancient Sources.
- 100 Diod. 16.24.2–16.25.1, 16.28.
- 101 See Map 3 Battle sites in central Greece.
- 102 Diod. 16.30.3–4.
- 103 Diod. 16.31.4. See also Paus. 10.2.4.
- 104 Diod. 16.34.2. Cf. Frontin. *Str.* 2.3.3; Polyaeus *Strat.* 5.16.2, 7.33.2.
- 105 Harding 1985, no. 74; Rhodes and Osborne 2003, no. 57.
- 106 Worthington 2008, 17–19.
- 107 See Map 1 Regions and cities.
- 108 Diod. 16.14.1–2. Cf. Diod. 15.61.3–5.
- 109 Diod. 16.35.2. It is possible that there was only one engagement, because Diodorus frequently mistakes one battle for two separate battles. For a discussion of Diodorus’s methodology and the errors that result from it, see Stylianou 1998, 132–139.
- 110 Polyaeus 2.38.2.
- 111 See Map 2 Battle sites.
- 112 Diod. 16.35.4–5.
- 113 Diod. 16.35.6. Cf. Diod. 16.61.2; Paus. 10.2.5; Eusebius *Praeparatio Evangelica* 8.14.33. For another high casualty rate, see Diod. 15.72.3.
- 114 Diod. 16.37.3.
- 115 Diod. 16.37.5–6.
- 116 Diod. 16.38.4–7.
- 117 Diod. 16.39.2.

- 118 Thuc. 5.57.2; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.17. Cf. Diod. 15.68.1.
119 Diod. 16.39.5–7.
120 Diod. 16.39.8.
121 Diod. 16.40.1–2. The Attic talent was around twenty-six kilograms (ca. fifty-seven pounds).
122 Cf. Diod. 16.34.1.
123 Diod. 16.44.1–2, 16.46.4, 16.46.8–16.47.2, 16.49.1–6. It is possible that this is one of the many chronological errors in Diodorus's work.
124 Diod. 16.56.2, 16.58.1. Cf. Dem. 19.141; *SEG* 22.410. See Map 4 Boeotian districts, cities, and towns.
125 Diod. 16.58.3. Cf. Dem. 18.18–19.
126 Diod. 16.38.1–2. Cf. Dem. 19.84; Justin 8.2.8–12.
127 Thuc. 4.108.1. See Map 1 Regions and cities.
128 For a discussion of the ancient sources for the Peace of Philocrates, which consist primarily of four tendentious orations by the bitter rivals Demosthenes and Aeschines, see Worthington 2008, 89–90.
129 Diod. 16.59.2–16.60.2.
130 See n. 119 above.
131 Diod. 16.76.3–4; Justin 9.1.2–4; Theopompus *FGrH* 115 F 292; Philochorus *FGrH* 328 F 162. Cf. Dem. 18.73, 18.87–94, 18.139.
132 For the background to the Fourth Sacred War, see Aeschin. 3.115–124; Dem. 18.140–155.
133 Philochorus *FGrH* 328 F 56.
134 Aeschin. 3.142–145.
135 Cf. Diod. 16.58.2–3, 16.59.2–4, 16.84.5.
136 Diod. 16.85.5. Cf. Justin 9.3.
137 Dem. 18.237; Aeschin. 3.97–98; Plut. *Dem.* 17.4.
138 For the date, see Plut. *Cam.* 19.5.
139 Diod. 16.86; Plut. *Alex.* 9.2.
140 Frontin. *Str.* 2.1.9; Polyaeus *Strat.* 4.2.2, 4.2.7.
141 Polyaeus *Strat.* 2.38.2.
142 Plut. *Pel.* 18.5.
143 For a discussion of the lion monument and associated issues, see Ma 2008.
144 Paus. 9.40.10.
145 Cf. Just. 9.4.6; Ma 2008, 84–85.
146 Diod. 16.56.6–7, 16.87–88.2; Paus. 7.10.5; Just. 9.4.4–5.
147 Diod. 16.87.3; Paus. 9.1.8, 9.6.5; Just. 9.4.7–10.
148 Harding 1985, no. 99; Rhodes and Osborne 2003, no. 76. Cf. [Dem.] 17; Diod. 16.89; Just. 9.5.1–6.
149 For discussion and earlier bibliography, see Worthington 2008, 182–186.
150 Diod. 17.2–4; Arr. *Anab.* 1.1.1–3.

- 151 Diod. 17.3.4, 17.4.4.
- 152 Arr. *Anab.* 1.7.2. For a brief description of Arrian, see Ancient Sources.
- 153 Arr. *Anab.* 1.7.5, 1.7.7.
- 154 For accounts of the siege and destruction of Thebes, see Diod. 17.11–14; Plut. *Alex.* 11–12; Arr. *Anab.* 1.7–9; Just. 11.3–4; Worthington 2003.

7 Hellenistic and Roman Thebes (323 BCE–476 CE)

The textual evidence for Hellenistic and Roman Thebes only provides brief glimpses of the city and shows how Thebes and Greece were consistently overshadowed by much more powerful entities. When Alexander the Great died in 323, some of his officers, traditionally known as the Successors, almost immediately carved up his massive empire and began a struggle for supremacy in which they often used Greece as a political, military, and cultural battleground.¹ In 316/15, Cassander, the son of the Successor Antipater, began rebuilding Thebes, probably in order to have a fortified stronghold in central Greece and to erase the memory of Alexander's destruction of the city.² However, the city was besieged twice in 293 and 290 when it revolted against Demetrius the Besieger, the son of another Successor Antigonus the One-Eyed. Over the course of the third and second centuries, Thebes and the Boeotian federation not only had to deal with Macedonian monarchs but it also had to compete with other powerful Greek federations, particularly the Aetolian and Achaean Leagues.³ By the early second century, Rome also became a major player in Greek affairs. A pro-Roman faction came to the fore in Thebes in opposition to those advocating for a Macedonian alliance. In the end, the Romans crushed all political and military opposition, dissolved the Boeotian federation, and created the Greek province of Achaea sending out the first governor in 27.

Rebuilding Thebes (316/15)

After Alexander destroyed Thebes in 335, he garrisoned the Cadmea but razed the rest of the city.⁴ Following Alexander's death in 323, Antipater, the governor of Macedonia, had to put down a major revolt of the Greek cities. After decisively defeating the Greeks at the battle of Crannon in 322, Antipater proceeded to Boeotia and encamped on the Cadmea.⁵ At Thebes, he received

envoys from the various Greek states and brokered a peace agreement that brought Greece back under Macedonian control. As Antipater himself lay dying in 319, he passed over his son Cassander and gave the regency of Macedonia to his deputy Polyperchon.⁶ However, Cassander managed to drive out Polyperchon and establish himself as regent of Macedonia, after which he conducted an invasion of Greece.⁷ According to Diodorus,

Cassander passed through Thessaly safely, but when he discovered that the pass at Thermopylae was guarded by Aetolians, he forced his way through with difficulty and entered Boeotia. He summoned Theban survivors from everywhere and undertook to rebuild Thebes because he assumed it was the best time to raise up a city that was widely known for its achievements and for the myths that had been handed down about it. He also supposed that by this benevolent act he would obtain undying fame.⁸

Before Cassander reestablished Thebes, however, he sought the permission of the Boeotians because of the Thebans' history of aggression against their neighbors.⁹ In addition to Cassander's effort, many Greek cities eagerly contributed to rebuilding Thebes. Diodorus says that the Athenians helped to rebuild part of the wall and Greeks from as far away as Sicily and Italy helped construct buildings and sent money.¹⁰ Arrian and Plutarch both relate that at the time of Thebes's destruction, Alexander had spared Theban religious officials, guest-friends of the Macedonians, relatives of the famous Theban poet Pindar, and those Thebans who had voted against the revolt.¹¹ Cassander therefore would have had a core of pro-Macedonian Thebans to inhabit the refortified city of Thebes.

Cassander's actions were part of the common propaganda that Alexander's Successors employed to curry favor with the Greeks. By rebuilding Thebes, Cassander could feign concern for a famous Greek city and at the same time secure a stronghold in central Greece against his enemies. Polyperchon had attempted to gain the goodwill of the Greeks by claiming he was going to free the cities and restore democratic governments throughout Greece.¹² But Cassander was determined to continue the earlier policy of his father, which was to support pro-Macedonian oligarchies backed by garrison troops. Antigonus the One-Eyed – one of the most powerful Successors – denounced Cassander's rebuilding of Thebes, and according to Diodorus made a declaration similar to Polyperchon's that all Greeks were to be "free, ungarrisoned, and autonomous." Diodorus adds that "after the soldiers voted to confirm his proposals, Antigonus sent men everywhere to convey the decree, since he assumed that through their hope of freedom the Greeks would be eager to participate in the war with him."¹³ Although Cassander had

temporarily allied with Antigonus to acquire the regency of Macedonia, after he secured his position he became a fierce opponent of Antigonus and Antigonus's son Demetrius the Besieger.

The rebuilding of Thebes took place over several years, with the city often serving as a stronghold for the battling Successors. Based on inscriptional evidence, it has even been suggested that Demetrius the Besieger contributed money to the rebuilding effort.¹⁴ This is not surprising considering that certain Greek cities were crucial in the overall battle for Greece. Thebes's legendary past and recent power in the fourth century undoubtedly made it an important pawn in the conflict among the Successors. And the Thebans generally were forced to ally with whichever Successor had the strongest army in central Greece at the time.¹⁵ In the early third century, the Thebans and Boeotians were caught up in never-ending power struggles. In 293 Demetrius the Besieger – having recently become king of Macedonia and ruler of Thessaly – entered into peaceful agreements with most of Greece, including the Boeotians. But then a Spartan named Cleonymus entered Thebes with an army, and an influential Thespian leader named Pisis convinced the Boeotians to revolt. So Demetrius besieged Thebes and forced the Boeotians to surrender. Cleonymus managed to escape, Pisis was captured but Demetrius pardoned him and even allowed him to hold the office of polemarch in Thespieae. Nevertheless, Demetrius garrisoned the Boeotian cities and installed a military governor.¹⁶ Demetrius's control of Thebes and Boeotia did not last long, however. While Demetrius was occupied with other theaters of war, the Boeotians revolted again, forcing Demetrius to return to Boeotia and undertake an extended siege of Thebes. Plutarch records a telling exchange between Demetrius and his son Antigonus Gonatas during this second attack on Thebes. Antigonus complained that his father was sacrificing lives unnecessarily, to which Demetrius replied that dead soldiers do not require rations.¹⁷ But Plutarch says that Demetrius also threw himself into the fighting and was seriously wounded in the neck by a bolt from a catapult. Plutarch adds that when Demetrius finally took Thebes again in 290 the Thebans were terrified that he would exact horrible revenge. As it turned out, however, he only “executed thirteen people, banished some, and pardoned the rest.”¹⁸ Demetrius's lenient treatment of Thebes – despite the revolt's cost in men and money – demonstrated how Macedonian monarchs frequently sought to ingratiate themselves with the Greek cities.

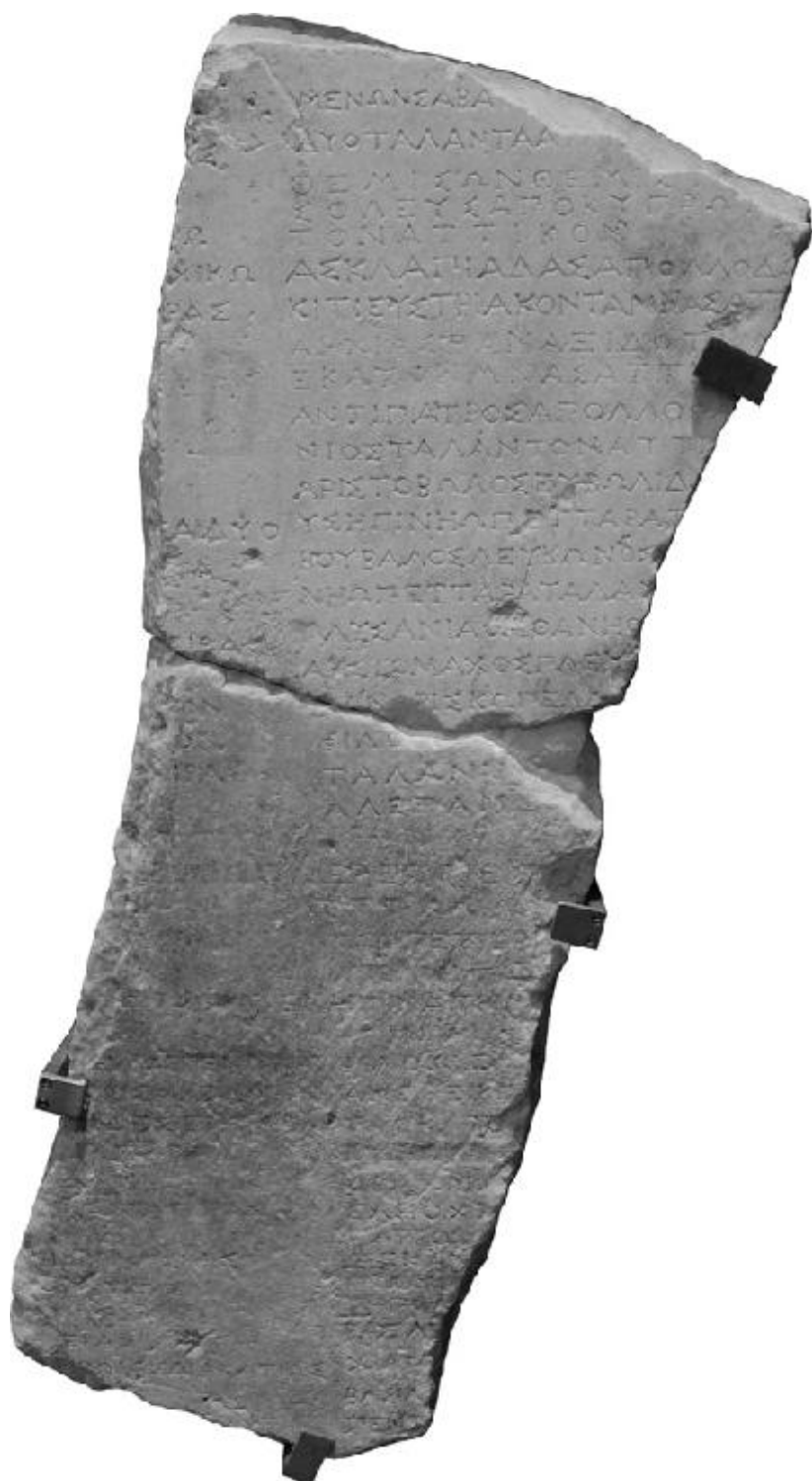


Figure 7.1 Stele with inscription of contributions for rebuilding Thebes (post

When Demetrius was driven from power two years later the Boeotians seem to have used the opportunity to fully reintegrate Thebes into the Boeotian federation.¹⁹ By this time there were two other emerging powers in Hellenistic Greece, the Aetolian League and the Achaean League. The Aetolian League had begun to play an increasingly dominant role in Greek affairs in the late fourth century.²⁰ In fact, one of the reasons Cassander may have sought to rebuild Thebes was to have a stronghold in central Greece to oppose the rising power of Aetolia.²¹ The mountainous terrain of Aetolia and the fact that it increasingly extended citizenship to non-Aetolians greatly facilitated the continual expansion of the Aetolian League throughout the third century. The major turning point in the Aetolians' increase in power and prestige came with their leading role in defending Delphi against invading Gauls in 279. Boeotians, Phocians, Locrians, and Athenians also participated in the action, but the Aetolians played the decisive role and soon were able to control the Amphictyonic League that oversaw the cultic affairs of the sanctuary at Delphi. The Aetolians were generally hostile to Macedonian monarchs and were the first Roman allies on the Greek mainland.²²

The Achaean League was revived beginning around 280, and eventually expanded beyond its core region of the northwestern Peloponnesus to include the whole Peloponnesus. Initially the reformed Achaean League was hostile to Macedonia, but in the late third century it needed military assistance against the Aetolian League, Sparta, Messene, and Elis, so it became a staunch Macedonian ally. In the early second century the Achaean League was compelled to switch allegiances again and it joined the Roman side, receiving the distinction of being a Roman ally on equitable terms. The historian Polybius – a leading statesman of the Achaean League in the second century – provides a significant amount of information for the Achaean League during its period of greatest influence. Polybius's account is heavily biased but clearly demonstrates the constantly shifting alliances in Greece, and how Rome eventually brought a hard-won stability to mainland Greece.²³

As part of the frequent changes in alliances in Greece, at one point the Boeotians entered into an alliance with the Achaeans against the Aetolian League. But in 245 the army of the Aetolian League marched into Boeotia and decisively defeated the Boeotians near Chaeronea, killing a thousand soldiers.²⁴ Polybius claims that the Boeotians had not waited for their Achaean allies who were on their way. After the defeat, Polybius says the Boeotians never again aspired to any distinction, resigning themselves to eating and drinking and letting their bodies and minds go.²⁵ Although Polybius's analysis of Boeotian decline is colored by his Achaean bias, it nevertheless reflects a

very real inability of the Boeotians to forge their own path in wider Greek affairs. Polybius goes on to complain that the Boeotians eventually abandoned alliances with both the Achaeans and Aetolians to become allies of the Macedonians.²⁶ But this was also something the Achaeans did in their bid to become the most powerful state in the Peloponnesus.²⁷

In an equally biased but more extensive description of third-century Thebes, a travel writer named Heraclides Criticus relates that the city of Thebes had been destroyed on three separate occasions “because of the oppressiveness and arrogance of the inhabitants.”²⁸ The three destructions the author is probably referring to are the legendary sack of Thebes by the sons of the Seven against Thebes, Alexander’s destruction in 335, and Demetrius the Besieger’s capture of the city in 290.²⁹ Heraclides Criticus goes on to say that Thebes abounds in horses, is well watered, and has the best gardens in Greece.³⁰ He also asserts,

The city is one of the best places to spend the summer in because it has abundant cold water and gardens. Besides, it is breezy and has a verdant appearance and is fruit bearing and plentiful in summer produce. Nevertheless, it lacks wood and is one of the worst places to spend winter in because of the rivers and the winds. For it also snows and there is a lot of mud.³¹

In addition to a physical description of the city, Heraclides Criticus provides a very negative character sketch of the Thebans. Although he begins by saying that “the inhabitants are magnanimous and admirable for their hopeful outlook on life,” he then declares, “They are bold, violent, arrogant brawlers, who make no distinction between foreigner and fellow-countrymen, and they despise justice.” Heraclides Criticus claims the Thebans do not settle their legal disputes through debate but rather through violence and force, similar to wrestling contests between athletes. He adds, “As a result, their lawsuits go on for at least thirty years” with the very real possibility of being murdered by one’s opponents.³² Heraclides Criticus then bluntly states, “Murders are committed among them for chance accusations.”³³



Figure 7.2 Modern Thebes with Mount Cithaeron in the background looking south

The author's generalizations continue with his discussion of Theban women. After conceding that some Theban men are good, he writes, "Their women are the most elegant and beautiful in regards to height, bearing, and grace of all women in Greece," and proceeds to quote from an unknown Sophoclean play, in which it is stated, "You speak to me of Thebes with its seven-mouthed gates, the only place where mortal women give birth to gods."³⁴ This is a reference to the mortal mothers of Dionysus and Heracles, Semele and Alcmena, respectively.³⁵ Heraclides Criticus then explains that Theban women wear veils that completely cover their faces:

The head-covering on their heads from their outer garments is such that the entire face seems to be covered as if with a mask. Only their eyes are visible, all the other parts of the face are concealed by their outer garments. They all wear white outer garments. Their hair is auburn and is fastened up on the crown of the head, which is called a small torch by the locals. Their sandals are plain and not high, crimson and low, but laced so that their feet appear to be almost bare.

Then he writes, "In their social behaviors they are not exceedingly Boeotian but rather Sicyonian. Their speech is charming, but that of the men is unpleasant and wearisome."³⁶ Of course this extended description of Thebes should not be taken at face value; but some historical reality may lie behind

some of the overgeneralizations and caricatures of third-century Thebes, though it is difficult to determine which ones exactly.

On the political and military front in the early second century, the Boeotians were forced to switch alliances again, this time being compelled to become allies of Rome. The Roman general Titus Quinctius Flamininus managed to bring Roman troops into the city of Thebes during deliberations of the Boeotian federation, which voted to support Rome in its war against Philip V of Macedonia.³⁷ However, after Flamininus decisively defeated the Macedonians at Cynoscephalae in 197 – demonstrating the superiority of the Roman legion over the Macedonian phalanx – the Boeotians descended into civil strife.³⁸ Polybius and Livy both relate that Flamininus allowed pro-Macedonians to return to Boeotia because he wanted to win the goodwill of the Greek cities, but the leading figure of the pro-Macedonians – a *boeotarch* named Brachyllus – was assassinated.³⁹ Flamininus was particularly concerned about potential hostilities with Antiochus III – another Hellenistic monarch – who eventually invaded Greece and temporarily won over the Boeotians.⁴⁰ As soon as the Romans defeated Antiochus at the battle of Thermopylae in 191, however, the Boeotians returned to their alliance with Rome.⁴¹

Some twenty years later in 171 the Boeotians sought to break their alliance with Rome again, but were quickly brought to heel and the Boeotian federation was officially dissolved.⁴² Thebes, however, continued to serve as a center for political unrest.⁴³ In the last great struggle against Roman supremacy, the Thebans joined the Achaean League in its effort to drive out Roman rule. In fact, Pausanias asserts that the Thebans played a prominent role in convincing the Achaeans to revolt against the Romans.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, when the Roman general Quintus Caecilius Metellus marched on Thebes the Thebans completely abandoned their city.⁴⁵ But Pausanias says, “Metellus did not allow either the burning of temples of gods or the destruction of buildings, and he forbade either the killing of any Theban or seizing any exile.”⁴⁶ Metellus did, however, punish the anti-Roman leader Pytheas who had advocated for rebellion. Roman power proved unstoppable and the war was brought to a swift conclusion with the famous destruction of Corinth in 146.⁴⁷ According to Pausanias, the Roman general Lucius Mummius destroyed Corinth and tore down the walls of the cities that fought against Rome. He then disarmed the populations and put an end to democracies and established governments based on property qualifications. Pausanias adds that Mummius dissolved the ethnic federations of the Achaeans, Phocians, and Boeotians among others.⁴⁸



Figure 7.3 Theban woman with head covered by outer garment and wide-

There is uncertainty about when the Boeotians were able to revive their federation, but it is clear they were involved in broader affairs during the late Hellenistic period.⁴⁹ Shared religious activities seem to have been the central feature of a continuing Boeotian identity. Although Pausanias says Rome allowed the Greeks to revive their federations, these associations almost assuredly lacked any real political and military power.⁵⁰ The Thebans defied Rome again during the Mithridatic War (88–85), but the Roman general Lucius Cornelius Sulla managed to take the city and gave half of its territory to religious centers – particularly Olympia and Delphi – from which he had borrowed money for the war.⁵¹ During the catastrophic civil wars of the Late Roman Republic, successive Roman generals fought pivotal battles in Greece against their main rivals. Gaius Julius Caesar defeated Gnaeus Pompey at Pharsalus in 48; and Caesar’s grandnephew Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus defeated Marcus Antonius at Actium in 31, effectively ending the struggle for supreme power in Rome.⁵²

Roman Thebes (30 BCE–476 CE)

The death of the last Hellenistic monarch, Cleopatra, the following year marks the end of the Hellenistic Age. Several years later the Romans converted Greece into the province of Achaea, sending out the first governor in 27.⁵³ This was also the same year that Octavianus was given the name Augustus, establishing himself as the first Roman emperor. Writing during the reign of Augustus, the Greek geographer Strabo relates that since Thebes’s high point of power and prestige in the fourth century, the Thebans “were doing worse and worse down to our time; and as a result, they do not even preserve the image of a respectable village.”⁵⁴ However, he also goes on to say that the Romans continued to hold the Thebans in high regard “because of the excellence of their government.”⁵⁵ By this time the Romans had fully assimilated Greek culture and were using it to create a sophisticated Roman culture of their own. As the Roman poet Horace says, “Captive Greece captured its uncivilized conqueror and brought the arts to rustic Latium.”⁵⁶ Vergil adds that other nations would continue to be superior in the arts, but the Romans were destined “to rule populations with legal authority” and their arts were “to impose the custom of peace, to spare those who have submitted, and to completely subdue the arrogant.”⁵⁷

Greece was venerated as a cultural foundation for Rome, and Greek cities returned the favor by honoring Roman emperors. Theban inscriptions make reference to various Roman emperors from the first to early fourth centuries

CE.⁵⁸ In addition, there is a fragment of a marble architrave from Thebes with the name of the Roman emperor Hadrian on it, which may indicate Hadrian commissioned a building in Thebes.⁵⁹ The travel writer Pausanias gives an overall impression of the city in the second century CE, but he primarily focuses on the myths and history of earlier periods. The third and fourth centuries CE saw considerable instability throughout the Roman Empire. In 375 CE Thebes suffered serious damage from an earthquake, but managed to withstand a Gothic invasion in 395 CE that devastated other cities in Greece.⁶⁰

Beyond these few brief references almost nothing is known about Thebes in the Roman Empire. Like other Greek cities, Thebes probably struggled to reconcile its glorious past with its subject status. An excellent example of how these two worlds could be reconciled, however, comes from the Boeotian writer Plutarch who exemplified the blending of Greek and Roman cultures. Plutarch was from the small but historically significant Boeotian town of Chaeronea, and was both a priest of Delphi and administrator of Greece under Hadrian. His most famous literary endeavor, the *Parallel Lives*, paired leading historical figures from Greece and Rome in entertaining and instructive biographies. He focused mainly on the virtues and vices of individuals and how these reflected larger issues not only about Greece and Rome but also the human condition. One of Plutarch's many extant biographies was on the Theban leader Pelopidas; but he also wrote a now lost biography on Epaminondas, the most famous Theban statesman, who was seen as the architect of the victory at Leuctra and the Theban Hegemony in general. In many ways, the lost biography on Epaminondas is similar to the history of ancient Thebes: it will never be completely known, but without a doubt it will remain a fascinating and instructive subject and will continue to evoke the tragedy and triumph of ancient Greece.

Notes

- 1 The most prominent Successors were Antigonus the One-Eyed, Antipater, Lysimachus, Ptolemy I, and Seleucus I. The three main kingdoms formed out of the wars of the Successors were the Antigonid, Ptolemaic, and Seleucid.
- 2 The Parian Marble dates the rebuilding of Thebes in 316/15 during the Athenian archonship of Democlide: Harding 1985, no. 1; Austin 2006, no. 1. Cf. Diod. 19.54.1.
- 3 For discussion and earlier bibliography on the Boeotian federation in the Hellenistic Age, see Beck and Ganter 2015, 151–157.
- 4 Arr. *Anab.* 1.9.9. Cf. Diod. 17.14.

- 5 Plut. *Phoc.* 26.3, 27.1. See Map 2 Battle sites.
- 6 Antipater was primarily concerned that the Macedonians would see the appointment of his son as an attempt to establish a new dynasty to replace the line of Philip II and Alexander the Great: Waterfield 2011, 73.
- 7 Diod. 19.51; Paus. 9.7.2; Just. 14.6.
- 8 Diod. 19.53.1–2. Cf. Diod. 9.7.1–2. Cassander established two other major cities during his reign, Cassandrea and Thessalonica: Diod. 19.52.2–3; Strabo 7 frag. 24. See Map 1 Regions and cities.
- 9 Diod. 19.54.1. The rebuilding of Thebes in 316/15 is one of two likely contexts for the construction of the famous lion monument at Chaeronea, the other being the reintegration of Thebes into the Boeotian federation around 285: see Ma 2008, 84. I would like to thank John Ma for sharing prior to publication his recent work on the autonomy of Boeotian cities in fourth-century Greece, which advocates extending the issue into the third and second centuries: Ma 2017.
- 10 Diod. 19.54.2. Cf. Symeonoglou 1985, 148; Pharaklas [1996] 1998, 5.
- 11 Plut. *Alex.* 11.6; Arr. *Anab.* 1.9.9–10; cf. Diod. 17.14.3. It is possible that some of the financial contributions for rebuilding Thebes may have been used to buy the freedom of enslaved Thebans abroad and bring them back to the city: cf. *Ath. Pol.* 12.4.
- 12 Diod. 18.55. Cf. Diod. 18.18.
- 13 Diod. 19.61.3–4. Cf. Diod. 19.63.4.
- 14 See Harding 1985, no. 131.
- 15 E.g., Diod. 19.75.6, 19.77.2–6, 19.78.2–5.
- 16 Plut. *Demetr.* 39.1–2.
- 17 Plut. *Demetr.* 40.2.
- 18 Plut. *Demetr.* 40.3. Cf. Diod. frag. 21.14.1–2.
- 19 For discussion, see Knoepfler 2001.
- 20 Cf. Arr. *Anab.* 1.10.2; Diod. 19.66.2; Just. 24.1.2–8.
- 21 Waterfield 2011, 92.
- 22 Malcolm Errington (2008, 83) says, “The Aitolian League was ultimately undefeated in the Lamian War after Alexander’s death,” and

maintained a precarious independence, certainly favored by the difficult mountainous geography of the region, while the Macedonian successors fought for supremacy in Greece. As long as there were several candidates for the Macedonian throne, Aitolia had always tended to support the challenger rather than the incumbent, and this attitude explains the League’s good relations with Demetrios until 294, when he became king in Macedonia.

- 23 See in particular Polyb. 2.37–70.

- 24 Plut. *Arat.* 16.
- 25 Polyb. 20.4.4–7. For a good discussion and earlier bibliography on the entire section on Boeotia in this part of Polybius's work, see Müller 2013.
- 26 Polyb. 20.5.1–3. Cf. Livy 29.12.14. During the Social War (220–217), the Boeotians apparently allowed the Macedonian king Philip V to pass through their territory: Polyb. 4.67.7.
- 27 Plut. *Cleom.* 16; Austin 2006, no. 71. Cf. Polyb. 2.46–55.
- 28 BNJ 369A F 1.12. For Heraclides Criticus, see McInerney 2012; 2013. See also Austin 2006, no. 101.
- 29 Cf. Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.7.2–4; Diod. 17.11–14; Plut. *Alex.* 11–12; Arr. *Anab.* 1.7–9; Just. 11.3–4; Plut. *Dem.* 39–40; Diod. frag. 21.14.
- 30 BNJ 369A F 1.13.
- 31 BNJ 369A F 1.21.
- 32 Cf. Polyb. 20.4.
- 33 BNJ 369A F 1.14–16.
- 34 BNJ 369A F 1.17.
- 35 *Il.* 14.323–325, 19.95–125; Hes. *Theog.* 940–942; Eur. *Bacch.* 1–5, 26–33; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.5–8, 3.4.3. See Family Tree.
- 36 BNJ 369A F 1.18–20. For discussion of the veil in ancient Greek society, see Llewellyn-Jones 2003.
- 37 Livy 33.1–2.
- 38 For the battle, see Polyb. 18.19–27; Livy 33.7–10. For the location of the battle, see Map 2 Battle sites.
- 39 Polyb. 18.43; Livy 33.27–28. Cf. Polyb. 18.1.1–2.
- 40 Polyb. 20.7.5; Livy 36.6.
- 41 Livy 36.15–20. See Map 2 Battles sites.
- 42 Polyb. 27.1–2; Livy 42.43–44.
- 43 Polyb. 27.5; Livy 42.46.7–10, 42.47.9–12.
- 44 Paus. 7.14.6–7.
- 45 Paus. 7.15.9.
- 46 Paus. 7.15.10.
- 47 Paus. 7.16–17; Livy *Per.* 52.
- 48 Paus. 7.16.9. Cf. Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.55.
- 49 For a recent discussion of Boeotia in this period and earlier bibliography, see Müller 2014. Because of the dearth of textual evidence for Boeotia in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, epigraphy is especially important for the history of the region.
- 50 Paus. 7.16.10.
- 51 Paus. 9.7.4–6. Cf. Plut. *Sulla* 12.3–6, 19.6.
- 52 See Map 2 Battle sites.
- 53 For discussion and earlier bibliography on Roman Achaëa, see Rousset

2008.

54 Strabo 9.2.5.

55 Strabo 9.2.39.

56 Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.156–157.

57 Verg. *Aen.* 6.851–853.

58 *IG* 7.2493–2504.

59 See Keramopoulos 1917, 398–399 n. 1.

60 Symeonoglou 1985, 156.

Ancient sources

Arrian (ca. 86–160 CE): Greek author who wrote an extant history entitled the *Anabasis of Alexander* in seven books. He relied on now lost works of contemporaries and late rhetorical sources. Arrian is usually considered one of the more reliable sources for Alexander the Great, but he appears to have been more concerned with style than with accuracy.

Diodorus (fl. 60–30 BCE): Diodorus of Sicily compiled a universal history in forty books entitled the *Library of History*, relying heavily on earlier sources now lost. Written in Greek, the *Library* begins with the mythical age and goes down to 60. Books one through five and eleven through twenty survive intact, with only fragments remaining for the rest of the books. Most scholars view Diodorus as a careless copyist, who frequently repeats the same historical event in different places, which results in numerous doublets; this is in addition to his overall inability to properly synchronize the chronological sources he relied on to structure his work. However, a few scholars have argued that Diodorus is not simply a copyist but rather exercises independent judgment and incorporates his own ideas throughout his writing.

Herodotus (ca. 485–425 BCE): Greek historian from the Anatolian city of Halicarnassus who wrote the first extant historical work in nine books entitled the *Histories*. Herodotus provides an expansive account of the Persian Wars (490, 480–479), acknowledging the achievements of both Greeks and non-Greeks but drawing stark contrasts between notions of Greek freedom and eastern imperialism and slavery.

Livy (59 BCE–17 CE): Roman historian who wrote a massive history of Rome entitled *From the Foundation of the City*, consisting of one hundred and forty-two books from the legendary founding of Rome in the mid-eighth century to 9 BCE. Books one through ten and twenty-one through forty-five survive, but there are summaries, excerpts, and fragments from almost all the remaining lost books. Livy generally comes across as a moralizing patriot, who believes strongly in the unmatched virtues of the Roman

people; but he is capable of criticizing the Romans when they do not live up to their professed virtues.

Oxyrhynchus historian (composition of work probably sometime between 386–346 BCE): Greek historian who wrote an account of Greek affairs (possibly 411–386) apparently as a continuation of Thucydides's work. Only fragments have survived of the Oxyrhynchus historian's text, which is known as the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* because the papyrus fragments were discovered at Oxyrhynchia, Egypt. The Oxyrhynchus historian represents an independent tradition parallel to Xenophon's *Hellenica* and may have provided much of the primary material for books thirteen and fourteen of Diodorus's *Library of History*.

Pausanias (fl. 150 CE): Greek travel writer who wrote a *Description of Greece* in ten books, all of which survive. He mainly focuses on the monuments, myths, and history of earlier periods in Greek history, but he provides an overall sense of the state of Greece in the Roman Empire. Pausanias's work has caused considerable debate because he is not always clear about the exact locations of certain sites. Nevertheless, he provides a wealth of information about the built topography of ancient Greece.

Plutarch (ca. 50–120 CE): Greek writer from the Boeotian city of Chaeronea who wrote on a variety of philosophical topics and produced paired biographies of famous Greeks and Romans entitled the *Parallel Lives*. Plutarch's biographies in particular provide a tremendous amount of information about ancient Greek and Roman history, but his purpose was to reveal an individual's character rather than write history.

Polybius (ca. 200–118 BCE): Greek historian who wrote a universal history in forty books entitled the *Histories*, which traces Rome's rapid rise as dominant power in the Mediterranean (220–167). Only books one through five survive intact; the remaining books survive in excerpts and quotations by later authors, except for books seventeen and forty, which have not survived in any form. Polybius is considered one of best historians from the Greco-Roman world, who critically evaluated his sources and attempted to remain objective about his subject matter. Nevertheless, he shows a clear bias for Rome and the Achaean League: he was a leading figure in the Achaean League but was accused of being unfriendly to Rome and was deported to Italy as one of a thousand Achaean political prisoners for seventeen years (167–150). He won acceptance into elite Roman circles, particularly that of Scipio Aemilianus, and accompanied the latter during Rome's final destruction of Carthage (146). Polybius eventually returned to Greece to help negotiate Rome's settlement of Greece.

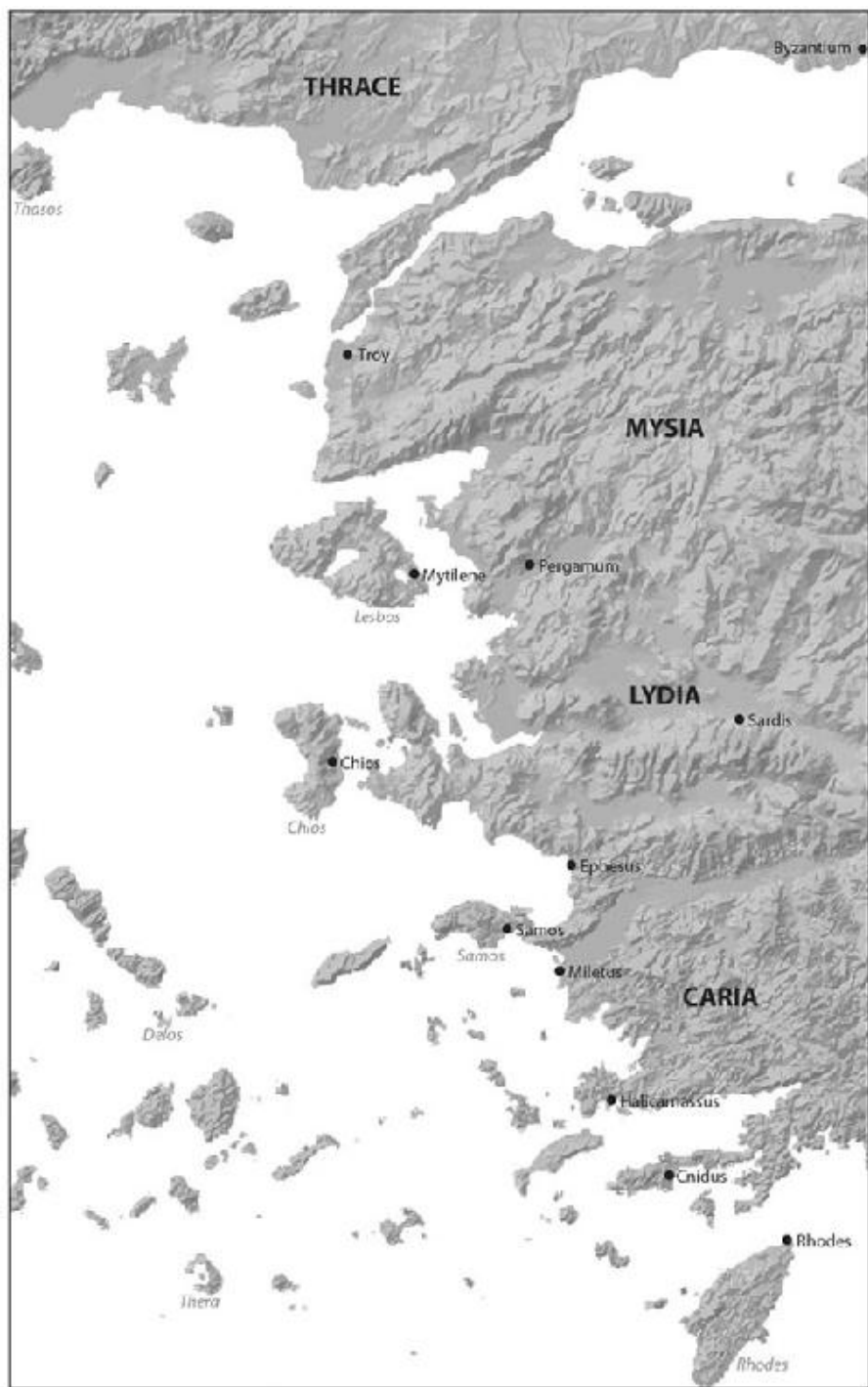
Thucydides (ca. 460–390s BCE): Athenian general and historian who wrote a detailed account of the Peloponnesian War (431–404), covering roughly the

first twenty years of the war in eight books. He was exiled from Athens in 424 for twenty years after he failed to save the Athenian colony of Amphipolis from going over to the Spartans. Thucydides is traditionally considered the classic example of the objective historian because of his self-professed emphasis on accuracy and human causation – many of his programmatic statements provide the foundation for historical research. However, scholars have become acutely aware that like any historian Thucydides was not free of biases and was as much a masterful literary artist as a historian.

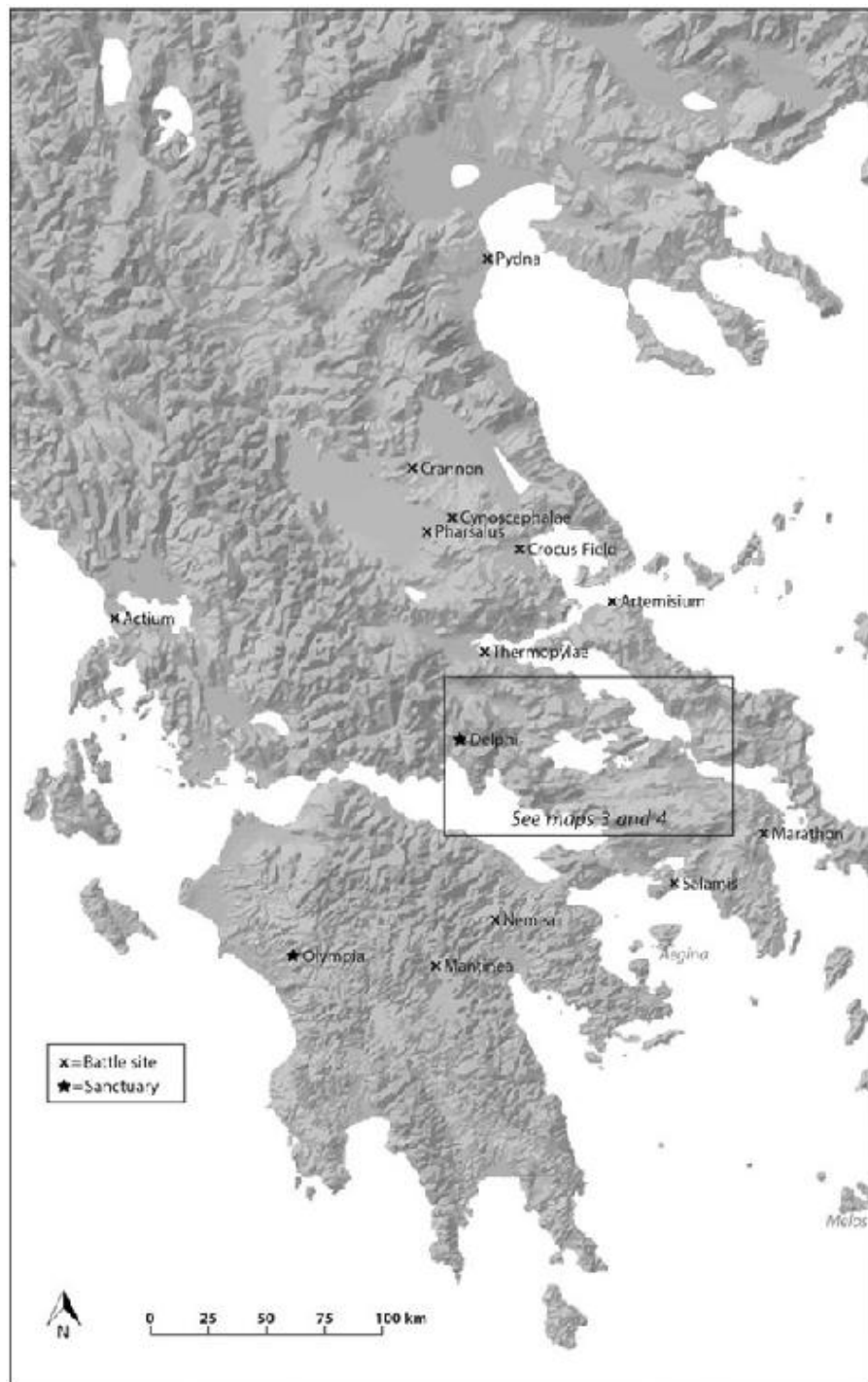
Xenophon (ca. 430–350s BCE): Athenian author who wrote, among other works, a continuation of Thucydides's account of the Peloponnesian War in seven books entitled the *Hellenica*: a history of Greek affairs from 411 to 362 that in a way provides an account of the three failed attempts of Athens, Sparta, and then Thebes to achieve ultimate supremacy in Greece. Although Xenophon was an Athenian he was exiled from Athens at some point in the early fourth century and fought on the side of the Spartans during the Corinthian War (395–386). Some time after 394, in fact, the Spartans granted him an estate in the Peloponnesus where he lived for over twenty years before being expelled after the Thebans defeated the Spartans at Leuctra in 371. As a result, Xenophon tends to exhibit pro-Spartan and anti-Theban biases.

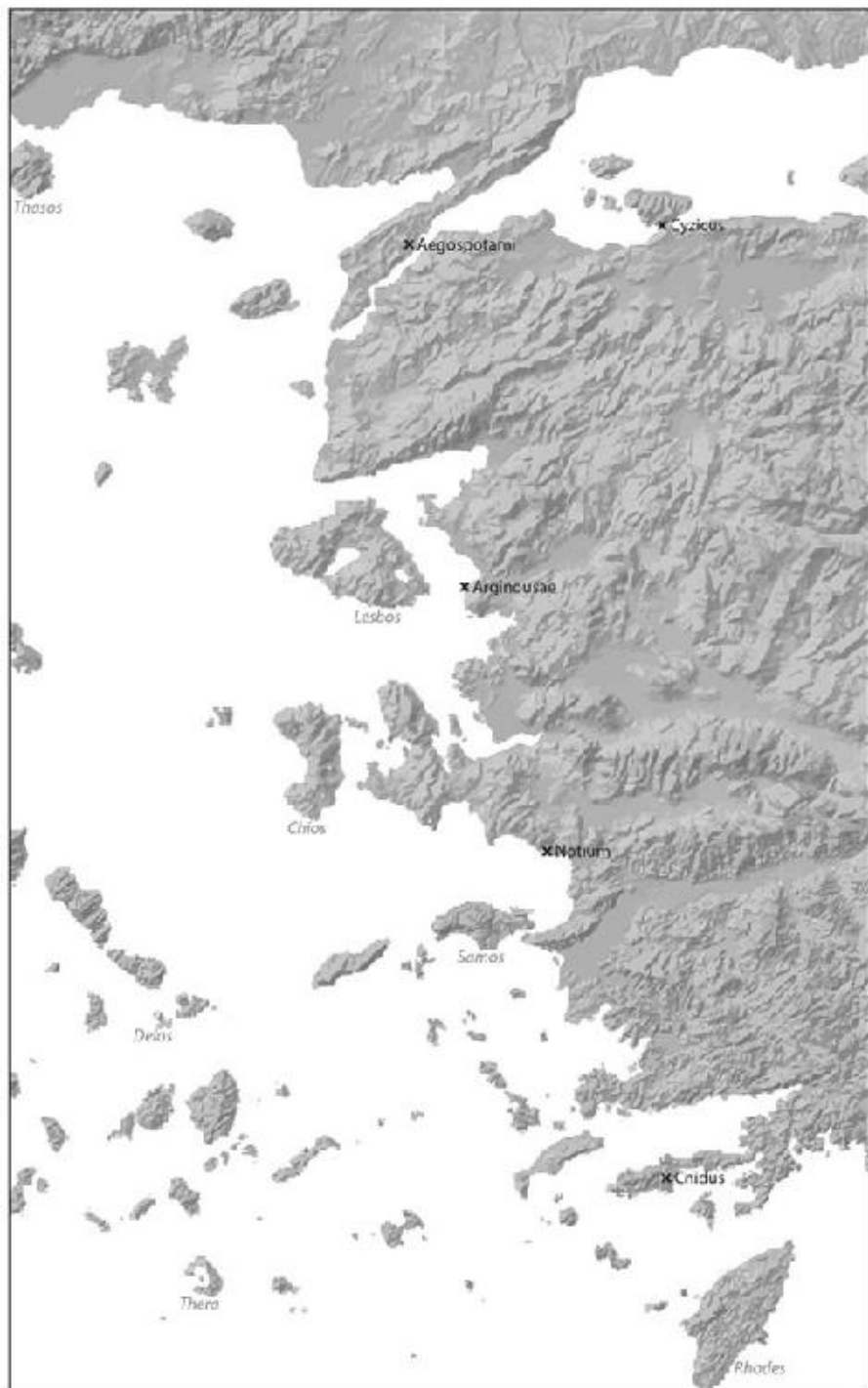
Maps





Map 1 Regions and cities





Map 2 Battle sites



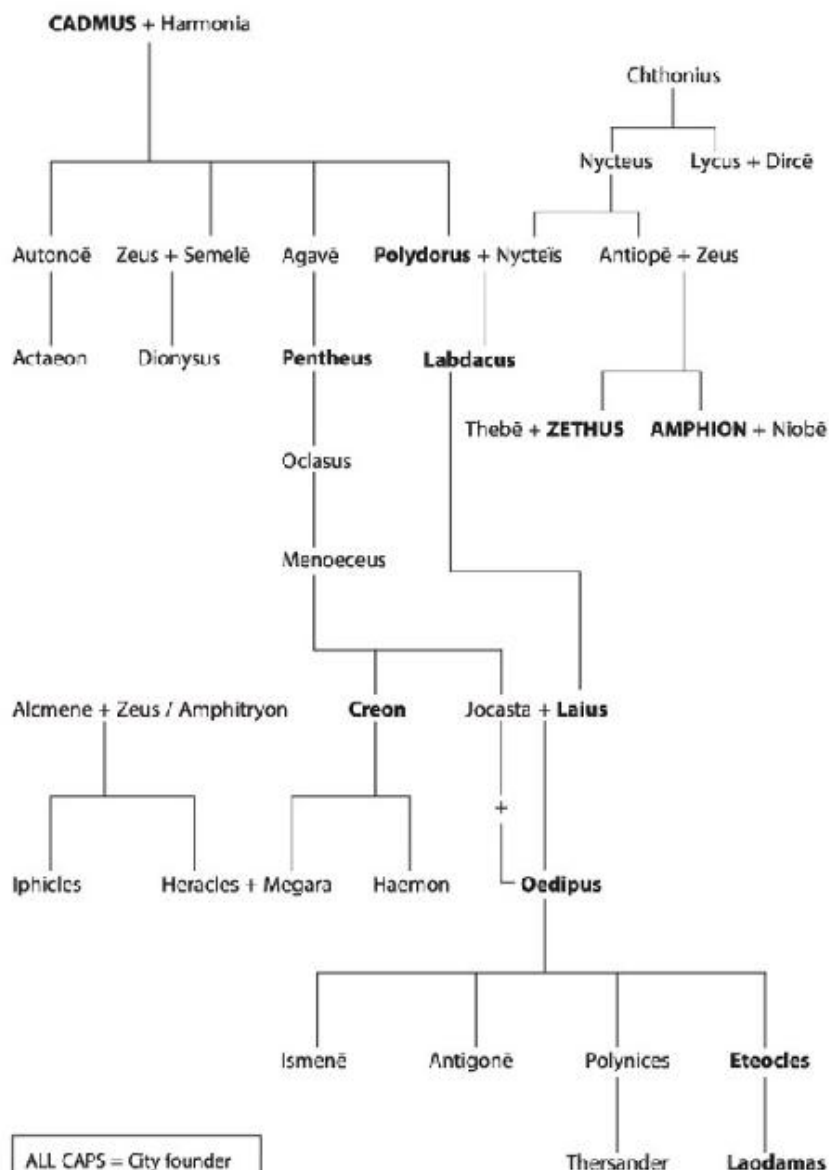
Map 3 Battle sites in central Greece



Map 4 Boeotian districts, cities, and towns (395 BCE)

Family tree

House of Cadmus



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